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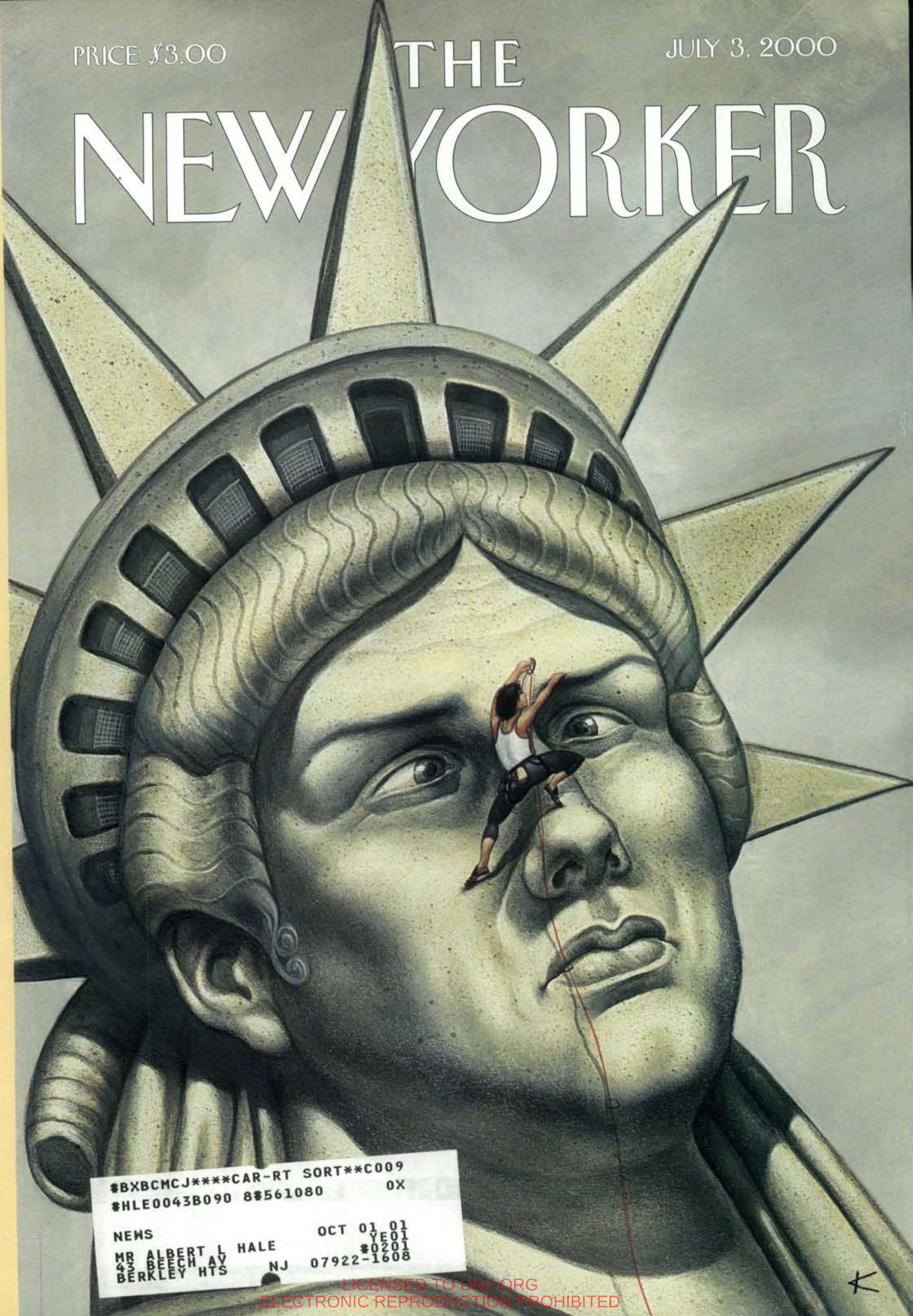
THE NEW YORKER

JULY 3, 2000



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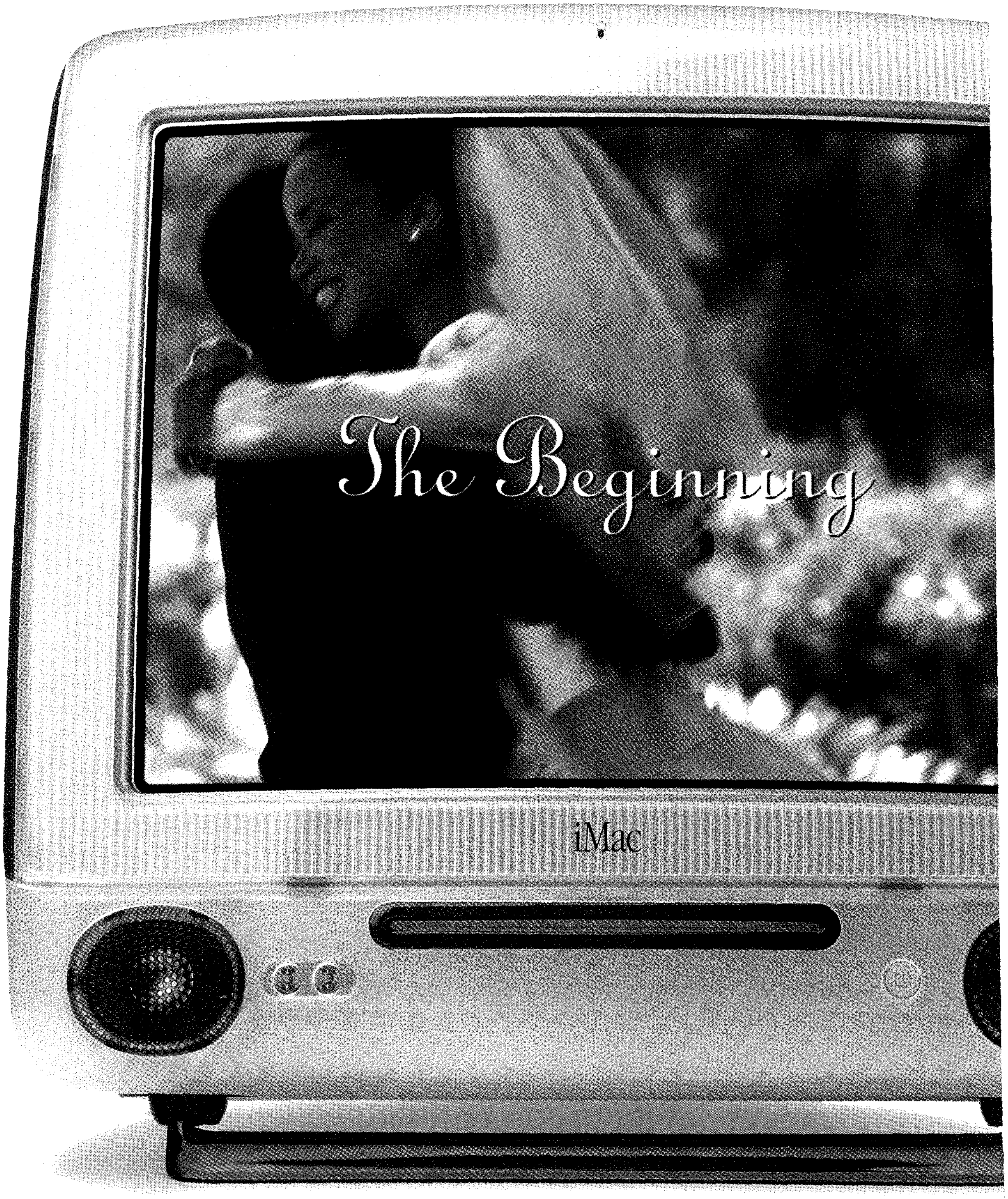

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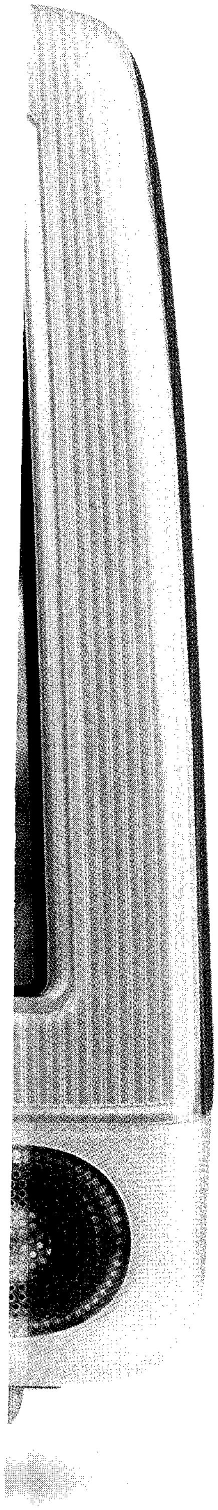

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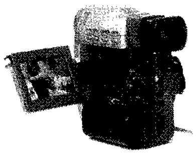

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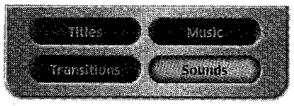

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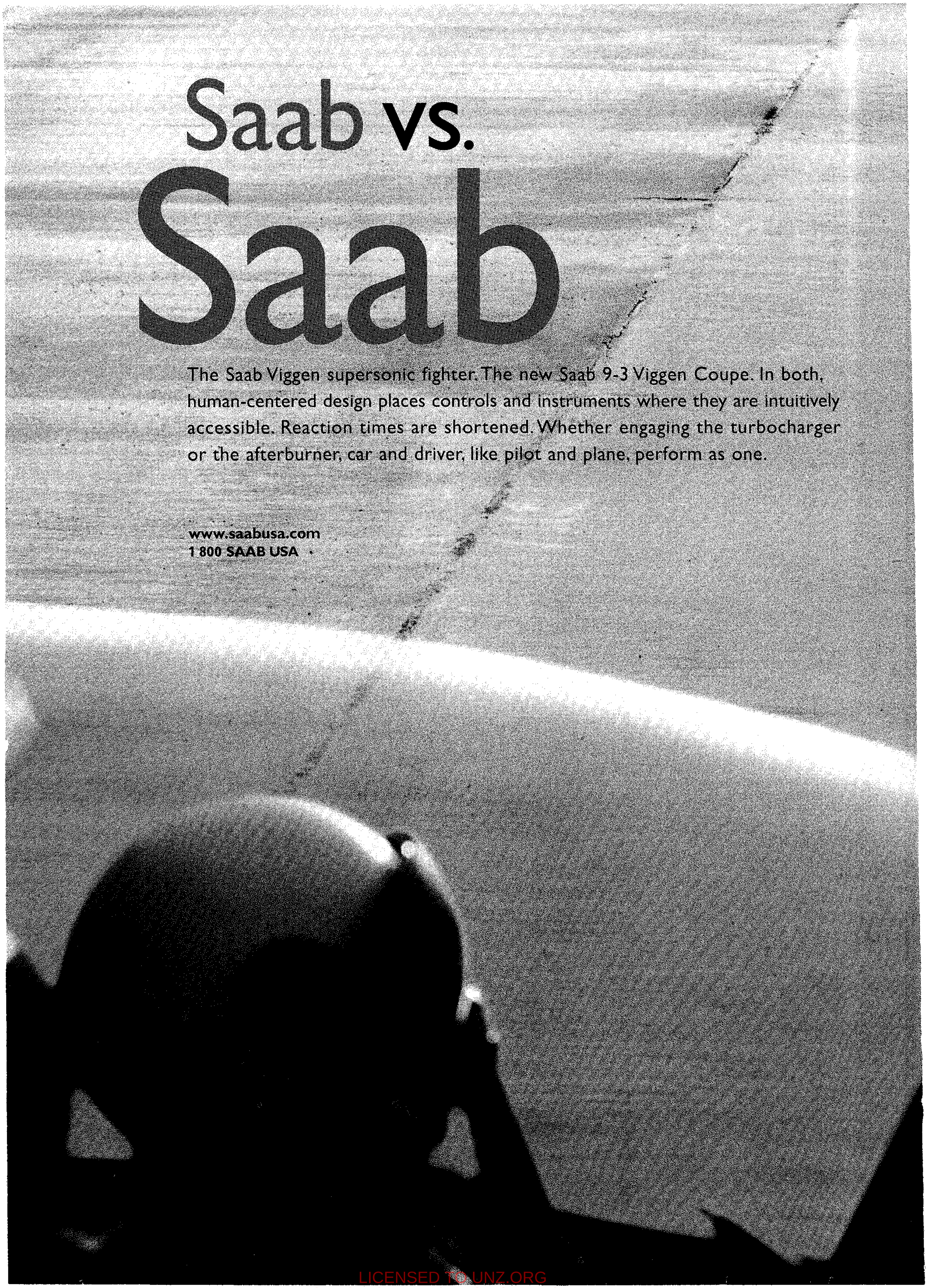

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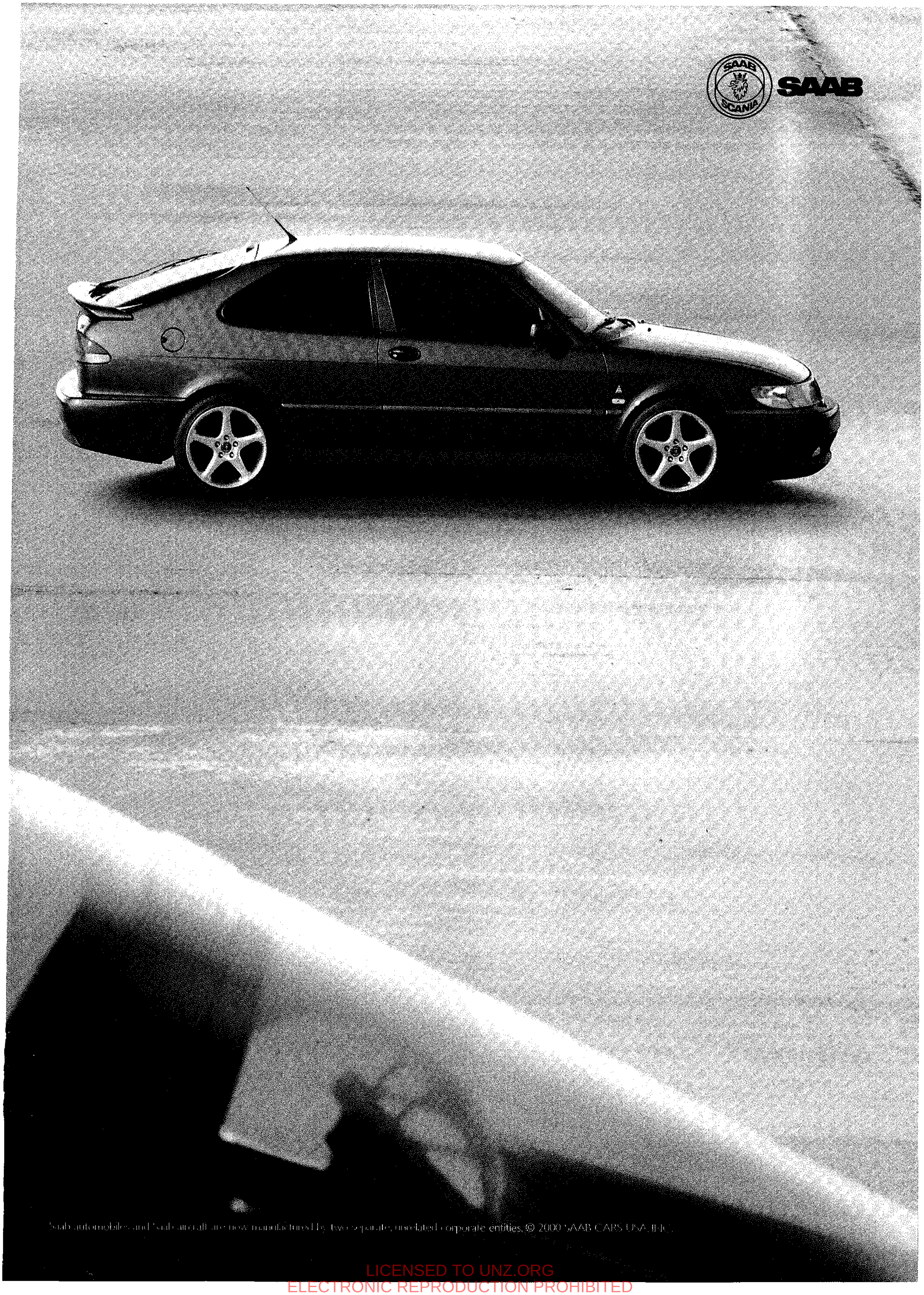
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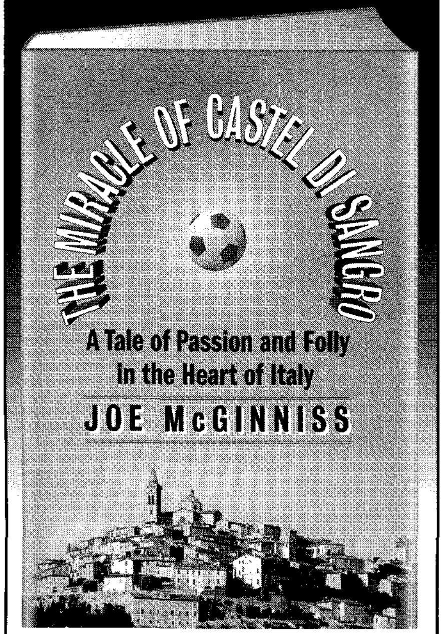
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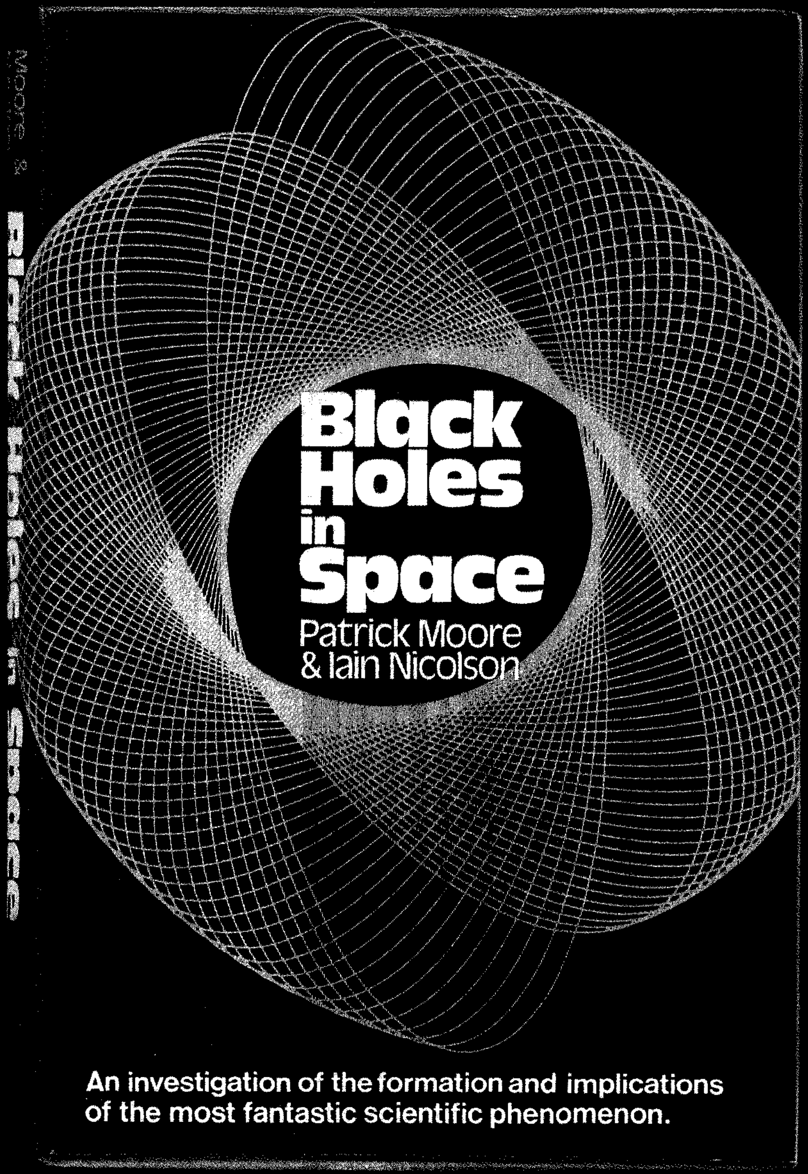
July 1, 1980. Sucked from shelf, enters parallel dimension or something.



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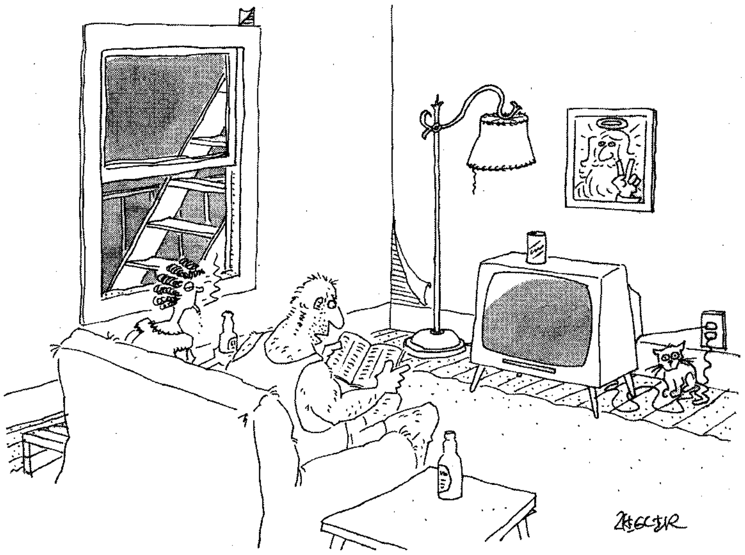

"Oh, goody. More reality-based crap."

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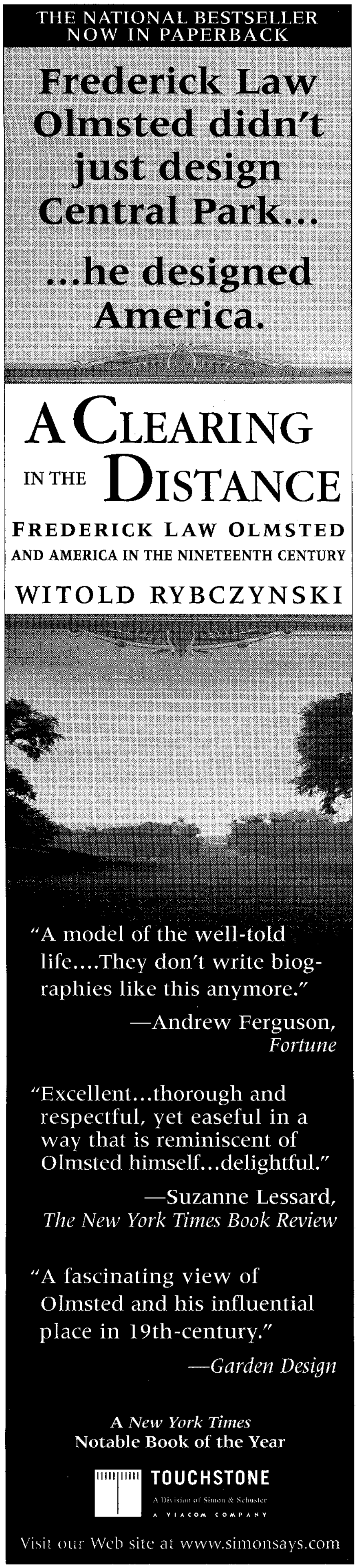

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PROSTATE ALTERNATIVES

In "The Prostate Paradox" (May 29th), Jerome Groopman describes the latest high-tech armamentarium for conducting Western medicine's war against prostate cancer, but he fails to mention any alternatives except "watchful waiting." I was diagnosed with prostate cancer almost two years ago. I rejected the "slash and burn" technologies as likely to do more harm than good, at least in my case, and my doctor advised me to wait and see, because technologies improve over time. But, like most men, I was unwilling to do nothing. A month of Chinese anti-cancer herbs lowered my P.S.A. into the normal range, and I have continued that and other alternative therapies, with good results. It is important to know that there are active alternatives to surgery and radiation.

Theodore D. Graves
Dillon Beach, Calif.

PARITY, AMERICAN STYLE

Jane Kramer is mistaken when she writes, in "Liberty, Equality, Sorority" (May 29th), that "America . . . had never even thought of *parité*, and still hasn't." At a conference on April 25, 1992, Bella Abzug spoke on the "National Parity Campaign." She outlined a proposal for the major political parties to nominate only women candidates until the number of elected officials reached gender balance. A member of the audience rose to offer another option: "My idea of parity is that women *run everything* for the next two thousand years."

Janet Falk
New York City

A RISING TIDE?

As someone whom George Gilder would describe as "hopelessly lefty," I was especially amused by Larissa MacFarquahar's recounting ("The Gilder Effect," May 29th) of a discussion in which Gilder breathtakingly pronounced that gaps between rich and poor do not result in the poor getting poorer, only in "more and more rich people." The facts show that, according to the Congressional Budget Office, between 1977 and 1995 the annual pre-tax income of the bottom twenty per cent of families fell by nineteen per cent—that is, the poor *are* getting poorer.

Philip Norden
Los Angeles, Calif.

WINNING FRIENDS

There is plenty of truth in Malcolm Gladwell's "The New-Boy Network" (May 29th) about the power of first impressions. What is left unsaid, however, is the dirty little secret that any manager or employee knows: with a few exceptions, social skills and fitting into the culture of one's company are truer reasons for success than any hard-boiled, quantifiable achievements. Above all, we all just want to feel comfortable with our colleagues.

Paolo Dobrilla
Woodland Park, Colo.

THE POETRY OF NUMBERS

The answer to the question implicit in the title of Amy Quan Barry's May 29th poem "If $\frac{dy}{dx}=\frac{4x^3+x^2-12}{\sqrt{2x^2-9}}$, then" is:

$$y=\frac{(8x^2+3x+72)\sqrt{2x^2-9}}{12}-\frac{39\ln(\sqrt{2x}+\sqrt{2x^2-9})}{4\sqrt{2}}$$

(plus a constant).

Timothy S. Lewis
Rochester, N.Y.

CORRECTION: In Seymour M. Hersh's "Overwhelming Force" (May 22nd), we referred to Sergeant Steven Larimore as a witness to shooting at Iraqi prisoners on February 27th. In fact, Sergeant Larimore was witness only to shooting at Iraqi civilians on March 1st.

•

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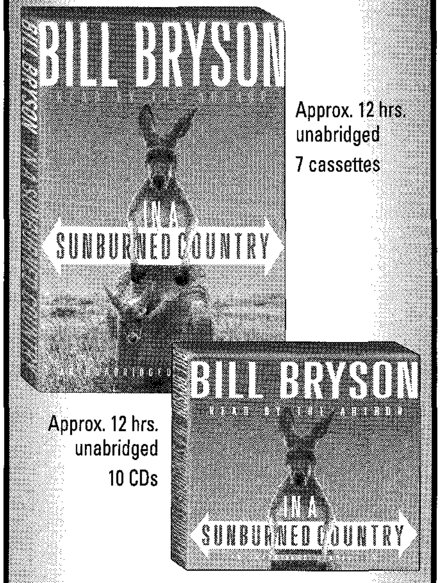

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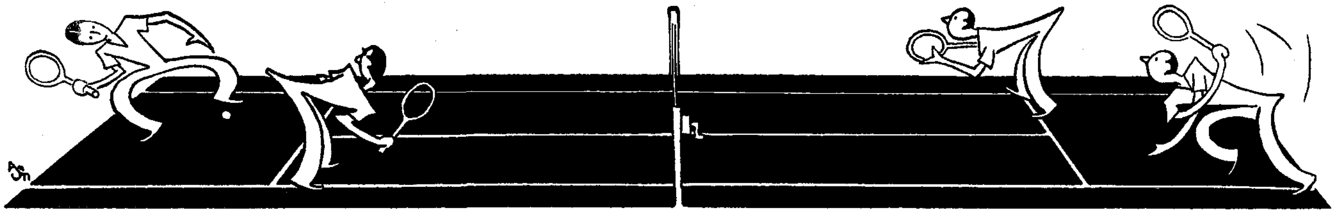

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AQUILA THEATRE COMPANY
The British-American touring troupe is in town for the summer. Repertory performances of the Iliad and "The Comedy of Errors" begin June 29. (Hemmerdinger Hall, 100 Washington Sq. E. 307-4100.)

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER
Nathan Lane and Jean Smart lead the cast in a Roundabout revival of Kaufman and Hart's 1939 comedy. Jerry Zaks is the director. Previews begin June 30. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

SPINNING INTO BUTTER
Rebecca Gilman's drama about the aftermath of a racist incident at a politically correct Vermont college. Daniel Sullivan is the director. Previews begin June 29. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

THE WINTER'S TALE
The New York Shakespeare Festival's first outdoor production of the season. In previews. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 539-8750.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AIDA
Disney's new musical—five years in the making and a product of Pharaonic expense—is, if not perfect, a lively, polished entertainment with bursts of joyful flamboyance worthy of its composer, Elton John. The two female leads—Heather Headley, as Aida, and Sherie René Scott, as Amneris—shine in their different ways, and Bob Crowley's brilliant sets give the show both visual dazzle and emotional resonance. Directed by Robert Falls. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/10/00.) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.)

THE BUBBLY BLACK GIRL SHEDS HER CHAMELEON SKIN
A musical memoir by Kirsten Childs, which follows its heroine from Los Angeles in the sixties to New York in the nineties. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes July 9.)

CAPITOL STEPS
The musical-theatre troupe's latest political satire, "It Ain't Over 'Til the First Lady Sings." (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

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CHICAGO CITY LIMITS
The improv company presents a new revue, "Chicago City Limits Turns 20: Now and Forever . . . and We Mean It." (Chicago City Limits Theatre, 1105 First Ave., at 61st St. 888-5233.)

CONTACT
The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play, a triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection and the atmosphere of longing, is a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser. (10/18 & 10/25/99) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

COPENHAGEN
Michael Frayn's play speculates on the controversial 1941 reunion of the two giants of quantum mechanics—the physicists Niels Bohr (Philip Bosco) and Werner Heisenberg (Michael Cumpsty). It is so meticulous, so admirable, and so grave that you want to tousle its well-kempt appearance and tell it to lighten up. Nevertheless, the director, Michael Blakemore, manages to make dynamic and suggestive an evening that consists of three actors (Blair Brown plays Margrethe Bohr) and three chairs. (4/24 & 5/1/00) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE CRUMPLE ZONE
A dark comedy by Buddy Thomas, set during a Christmas gathering of five gay men. (Rattlestick Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl. 532-8887.)

CURRENT EVENTS
A liberal California senatorial candidate returns to his Connecticut home, in a new drama by the actor and playwright David Marshall Grant ("Snakebit"). (Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes July 16.)

THE DANCE ON WIDOWS' ROW
Four rich widows throw a party for the town widowers, in a comedy by Samm-Art Williams. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 353-1176.)

THE DESIGNATED MOURNER
Through a series of intercut monologues, this extraordinary, beautifully written play by Wallace Shawn imagines a time in the future when the contemporary culture will have lost its historical memory and literary heritage and taken up residence in a state of barbarous, mindless sensation. Alternately coruscating and hilarious, the tale is narrated by Shawn with pitch-perfect irony, and Deborah Eisenberg and Larry Pine give strong performances as remnants from the world of privilege and taste which Shawn is at once mocking and mourning. Well directed by André Gregory and memorably staged on the top floors of a derelict men's club deep in the financial district. An important theatrical event. (5/15/00) (21 South William Street. 532-8887. Closes July 17.)

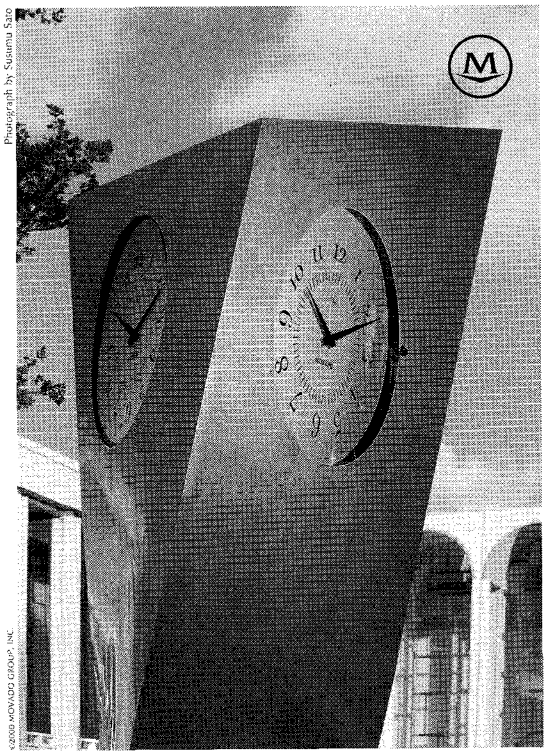
DIRTY BLONDE
Mae West's flirty and dirty persona is the subject of a cunningly written, raffish evening conceived by the writer-actress Claudia Shear and the director James Lapine. Mae's story is recounted with brio by two fans—Jo (Shear, who doubles winningly as Mae) and Charlie (the superb Kevin Chamberlin). The success of the play rests not on the louche facts of West's life but on the intersection of her story with the sweetness of the evolving relationship between the two lost souls who narrate it. (2/7/00) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF
Ntozake Shange's 1974 choreopoem, directed by George Faison. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

HIP-HOP THEATRE FESTIVAL
Two one-woman shows: "Surface Transit," by Sarah Jones, who portrays eight urban characters, and "Sistah Supreme," an autobiographical piece by Liza Colon-Zayas. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR
This misguided Broadway revival of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1971 musical version of the Saviour's last days on earth starts out by asking the tantalizing question "What's the buzz?" but never delivers a theatrically satisfying answer. Still, with its archaic whiff of right-wing outrage and its singable seventies-rock score, it's fun for nostalgia's sake. (Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

JITNEY
August Wilson's play—a reworked and expanded version of a 1979 one-act—is set in a car-service station in 1977, in a part of Pittsburgh which is being demolished faster than it's being renovated. In this atmosphere of decay, Wilson's characters struggle with themselves and with each other to find some hope, and some peace, amidst the rubble. The cast of nine wonderful actors (almost all of whom have appeared in at least one of Wilson's other plays), including Stephen McKinley Henderson, Barry Shabaka Henley, and Paul Butler, hit perfect notes of collision and cohesion, and turn what might otherwise be a draggy experience (the play runs to nearly three hours) into a riveting and moving one. Directed by Marion McClinton, with a tremendous assist from David Gallo's evocative set. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)



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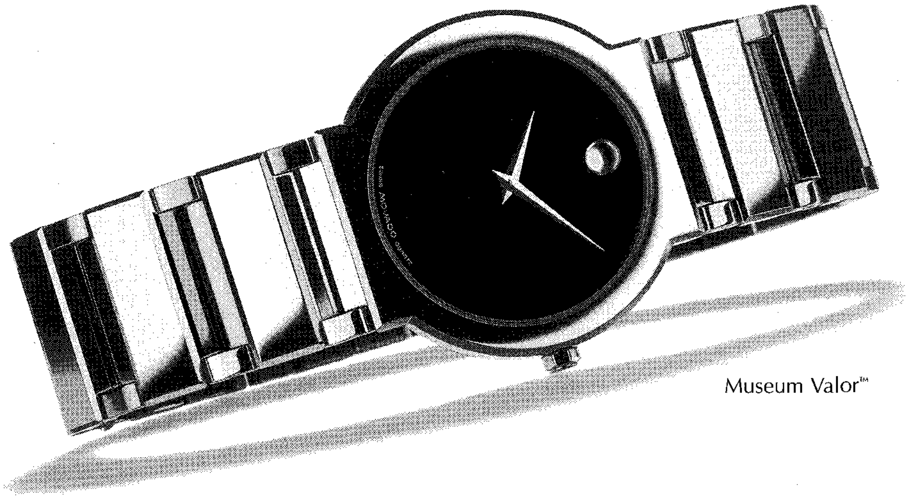

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JOE FEARLESS (A FAN DANCE)
Liz Tuccillo's play, which incorporates music, dance, and full-court basketball, follows a rabid sports fan through the N.B.A. finals. (Atlantic, 335 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

KISS ME, KATE
With all its admirable expertise and its various delights, this production of the Cole Porter musical is oddly earthbound: it comes down to the vexing issue of chemistry. The leads, Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell, are expert players, but they are not—in the true meaning of the words—star performers. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE LARAMIE PROJECT
A drama about the murder of gay-hate victim Matthew Shepard, written and directed by Moisés Kaufman. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

LYDIE BREEZE
John Guare has rewritten his two 1982 plays, "Lydie Breeze" and "Gardenia," as a drama in two parts, presented in rotating repertory. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes July 2.)

MEASURE FOR MEASURE
The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival begins its summer season. (Boscobel Restoration, Garrison, N.Y. For ticket information and directions, call 914-265-9575.)

A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN
A solid and satisfying revival of Eugene O'Neill's 1943 drama. Gabriel Byrne's performance, as James Tyrone, an alcoholic actor who returns to his Connecticut farm from New York to unburden himself in the arms of the earth mother Josie (Cherry Jones), is something to see. Daniel Sullivan directed. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. Closes July 2.)

THE MUSIC MAN
The first thing that has to be said about this delightful revival of Meredith Willson's 1957 musical, which is under the direction of Susan Stroman, is that it has magnificently solved the Robert Preston Problem in the person of Craig Bierko, who is making his Broadway début in the role of Professor Harold Hill—the role that Preston, of course, immortalized in the original show and in the 1962 movie. Bierko talks and moves and sings with great confidence and charm, and he has the weight and presence on the stage that we associate with male musical stars of several decades ago. Bierko and Rebecca Luker, as Marion, the librarian, make a terrific couple, and Luker's sweet, warbly voice is just right for the era of parlor songs, in which the musical is set. The show hits us with the simplicity and seamlessness of a perfect fairy tale, and it puts music in its proper place—right up there with all the other miracles of life. (5/22/00) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

NEIL SIMON'S HOTEL SUITE
An evening of one-acts taken from the playwright's three "Suite" plays. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

THE PICTURE
This new translation, by Abigail Sanders, of Eugène Ionesco's 1963 investigation of the transformative power of art (and the limits thereof) is both intellectually intriguing and very funny. Ionesco's answers to perennial questions—whether beauty or happiness can be bought, what kind of power is most corrupting—while predictable, are still relevant. The two lead performances, by Tony Torn, as a rich businessman, and Tom Pearl, as a painter, are a delightful juxtaposition of the bombastic and the subtle styles of comedic acting, and Ian Belton's direction is perfectly paced. (Cha, 135 W. 42nd St. 206-7188. Closes July 1.)

PROOF
The young playwright David Auburn's drama stars Mary-Louise Parker as the daughter of a brilliant University of Chicago mathematician, whose life and career began to disintegrate in his mid-twenties when he became mentally ill. Parker's character appears to have similar gifts and, possibly, similar troubles, and Parker skillfully and believably delivers the smart and sullen, insolent and indolent goods, as she has done many times in the past. Auburn has taken on some biggies here: what the link may be between genius and mental instability, why it is that lives get stuck, and how elusive the truth can be. For all that, you wish the play were a little richer, a little less simply resolved; but its level of accomplishment and the realness of its characters show that Auburn has both depth and a voice. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes July 9.)

THE REAL THING
Revived here with an excellent cast (especially Stephen Dillane) and subtle direction by David Leveaux, Tom Stoppard's 1984 drama remains the wittiest, sharpest look at that twisted thing called love to come around in decades. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

THE RIDE DOWN MT. MORGAN
"Why have I been condemned?" the aptly named bigamist Lyman Felt (Patrick Stewart) asks, rather whinily, toward the end of Arthur Miller's latest play, an examination of the seeming impossibility of fidelity, or, at least, lifelong marriage. And you trust that Lyman is truly in the dark about how he could be convicted of having love for two women. The problem with Miller's project is that his lying Lyman is no longer in love with his first wife at all, and he seems to have only lust for the second. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. Closes July 23.)

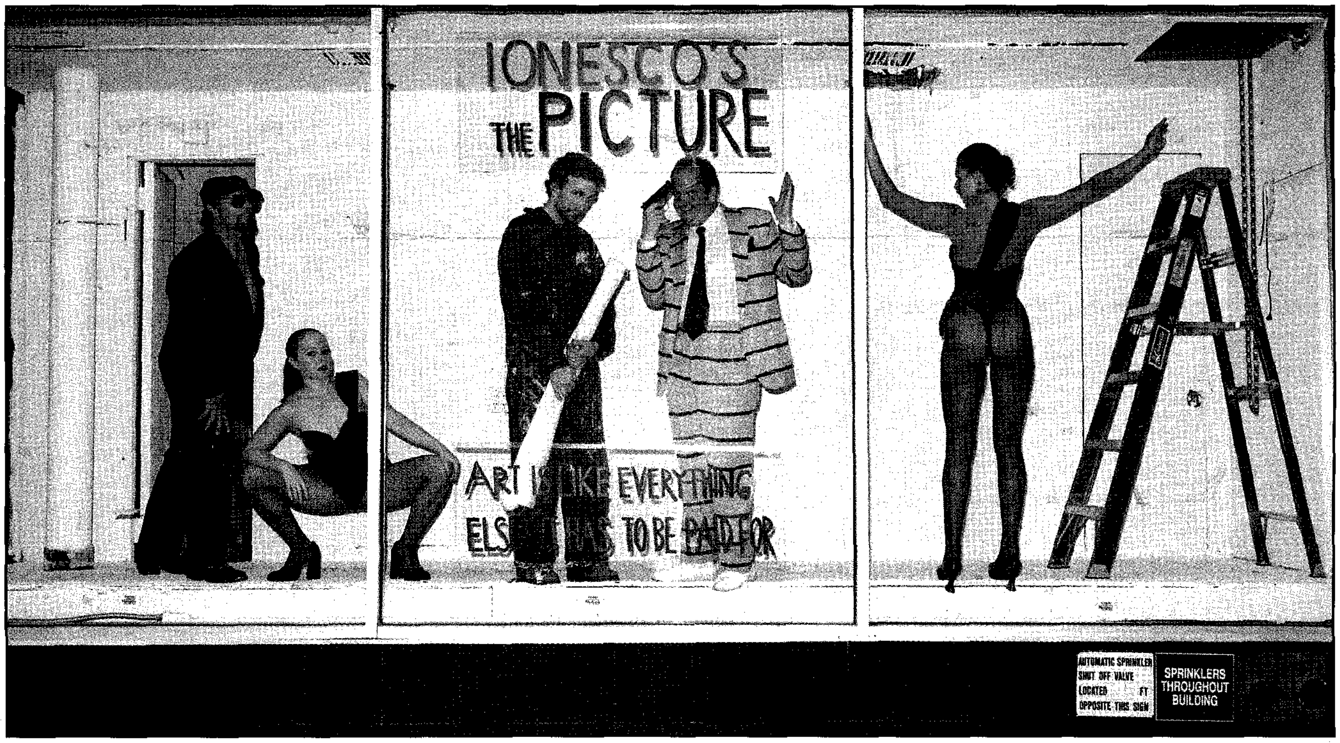
THE RIDICU-FEST
A festival of camp comedies by playwrights both familiar (Charles Busch, Charles Ludlam, Ethyl Eichelberger) and little known (John Issendorf, Todd Miller). (For schedule and location information, call 420-1466.)

RIVERDANCE
The Irish troupe of dancers, singers, and musicians. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

ROMEO AND JULIET
Shakespeare's play doesn't need a Greek chorus onstage for the entire show, but in this visually and aurally rich production, splendidly directed by Gregory Wolfe, it seems to. The chorus speaks the prologue and a few other lines, but, much more significantly, their presence provides a detached commentary on the action, which makes the audience see this familiar play anew and complements the high energy of the talented cast. Mr. Wolfe makes good use of cross-gender casting in a few roles (notably Tom Shillue as a sweet, shrewd Nurse and Jennifer Carta as a lovesick Benvolio), and Monique Vukovic plays Juliet, effectively, as a bundle of nerves. Sets by Lowell Pettit, lights by Jen Acomb, and music by Andrew Sherman. (Connelly Theatre, 220 E. 4th St. 279-4200. Closes June 30.)

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER
John Travolta is not easy to replace, nor are the ashes of disco fever likely to reignite, as this show, based on the 1977 movie, demonstrates. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

STRAIGHT-JACKET
A nineteen-fifties Hollywood actor marries a studio owner's secretary in order to conceal his homosexuality, in a comedy by Richard Day. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.)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THE PICTURE
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ELS AS TO BE PAID FOR
AUTOMATIC SPRINKLER SHUT OFF VALVE LOCATED FT OPPOSITE THIS SIGN
SPRINKLERS THROUGHOUT BUILDING

FREDERIKE HELWIG

The cast of Ionesco's "The Picture," staged by the Sanctuary Theatre Workshop, with company founder Rip Torn (left).

TRUE WEST
A sensational revival of Sam Shepard's 1980 play, directed by Matthew Warchus. It's a droll tall tale of sibling rivalry, in which an intrusive, beer-swilling outlaw named Lee and his brother, Austin, a put-upon Ivy League screenwriter, face off in their vacationing mother's tidy modern kitchen. Josh Brolin and Elias Koteas have taken over the starring roles. (3/27/00) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.
DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.
FORBIDDEN BROADWAY
Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.
JACKIE MASON: MUCH ADO ABOUT EVERYTHING
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
Final performances of the season. June 28 at 2 and 8 and July 29 at 8: "La Bayadère." ♦ June 30 at 8: "Theme and Variations," "Le Corsaire" pas de deux, "Manon" pas de deux, and "Études." ♦ July 1 at 2: "Push Comes to Shove," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Manon" pas de deux, and "Études." ♦ July 1 at 8: "Theme and Variations," "Manon" pas de deux, "Known by Heart" pas de deux, and "Études." (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)
PILOBOLUS DANCE THEATRE
For its annual monthlong engagement, the six-member company brings three programs, each of which includes three repertory works and a première. The two premières in the opening week are "Tsu-ku-tsu," choreographed by Pilobolus co-founder Alison Chase in collaboration with *taiko* drummer Leonard Eto, and "Sweet Dreams," choreographed by Michael Tracy. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. June 27-30 and July 3 at 8, July 1 at 2 and 8. Through July 22.)
"THE COMMON GOOD"
To compose this work (subtitled "Dance Made with Advice from Others"), Douglas Dunn solicited contributions—for gestures, images, movement phrases, big themes—from his dance-world Rolodex. The resulting piece for six dancers is a sort of evening-length portrait of the dance community. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. June 29-July 2 at 8:30.)
ALPHA OMEGA THEATRICAL DANCE COMPANY
The fourteen-member company, which has built its repertory from works by minority choreographers, presents pieces by Gary De Loatch, Roberto Villanueva, Martial Roumain, Al Perryman, and the company's director, Enrique Cruz De Jesus. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. June 29-July 1 at 8.)
"VELO/CITY"
The three suit-jacketed performers of the Toronto-based Parallel Exit company depict the drill-team precision of office life through vaudeville shtick and acrobatic routines. (Walkerspace, 46 Walker St. 662-1080. June 28-July 2 at 8:30.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL
June 28-30 at 8, July 1 at 2 and 8, and July 2 at 2: 59° North: Soloists of the Royal Swedish Ballet. ♦ June 29-30 at 8:15 and July 1-2 at 5: RosyCo. (Becket, Mass. For information about tickets, call 413-243-0745.)

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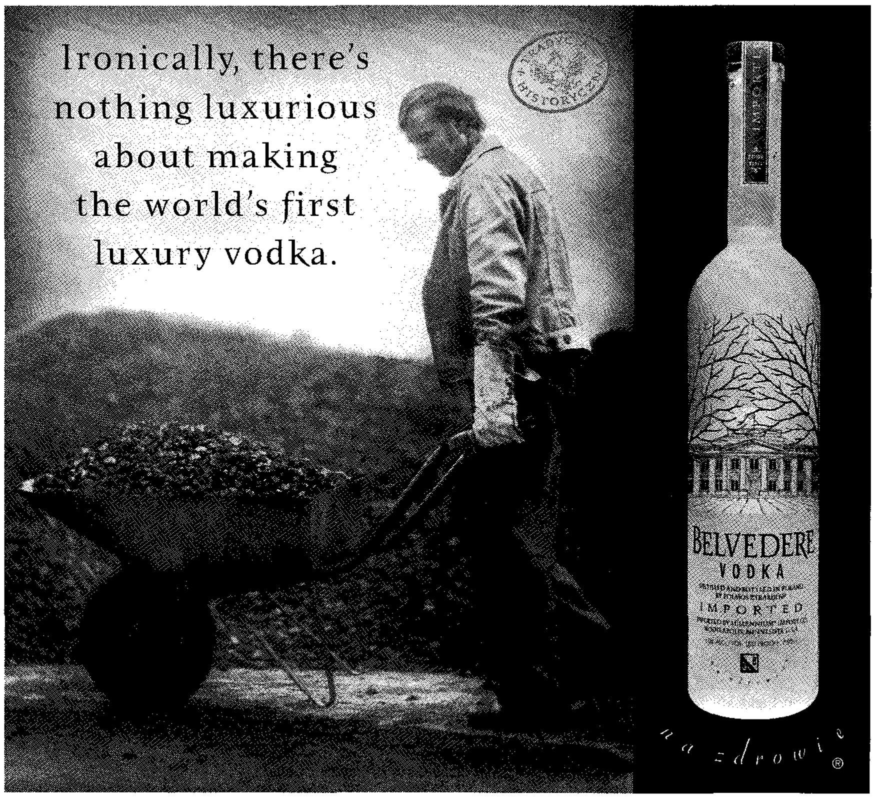
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NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

BRITNEY SPEARS
The post-pubescent dynamo recently suffered a minor setback when her new CD, "Oops! . . . I Did It Again," spent only a week atop the charts before being dethroned by "The Marshall Mathers LP," the latest release by the sociopathic rapper Eminem. Don't be too concerned for Britney. Though her live shows have been rumored to lean somewhat heavily on lip-synching (a notion she cleverly parodied during a recent episode of "Saturday Night Live"), her precocious choreography—and her I'm-not-that-innocent crotch-grabbing—help carry the day. (Jones Beach Theatre. 516-221-1000. June 27-30 at 7:30.)

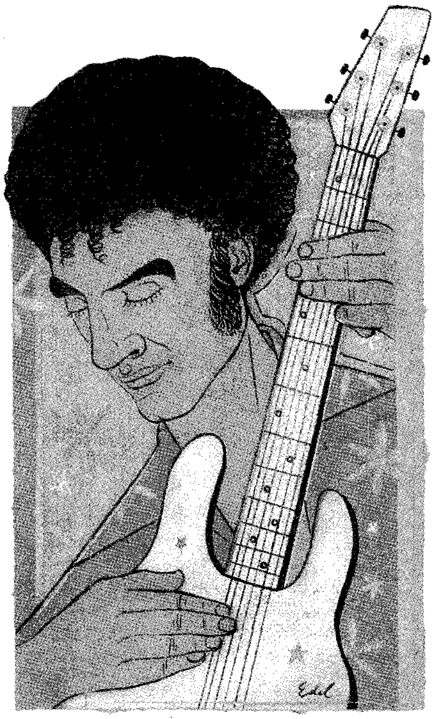
MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING
This annual alfresco dance festival at Lincoln Center Plaza starts on June 28 with **Albita,** a singer known as the Cuban Madonna, leading a night of mambo. ♦ June 29: Fiddler **Kevin Burke** and his **All-Star Ceili Band** offer a program of Irish dancing. ♦ June 30: Rumba dancing to **Tropicana d'Haiti.** ♦ July 1: Swing and jump blues are the order of the evening with the **Beale Street Swing Mavens** and the **Johnny Nocturne Band.** ♦ July 4: Ballroom swing with a beat-heavy flavor tops off Independence Day, when percussionists **Candido, Panama Francis,** and **Bobby Rosengarden** join the **Mike Berkowitz Big Band.** (For more information, call 875-5766. All shows at 8:15. Dance lessons are offered at 6:30.)

RANDY NEWMAN / JONATHAN RICHMAN
After years of success as a film composer, the master of ironic pop miniatures returned to solo work with last year's "Bad Love," which found both his satiric and melodic abilities in fine form. / Richman, the proto-punk icon with the adenoidal voice, can wring exuberant pathos out of anything, whether he's singing about Cézanne or insects. Calling him "sensitive" is something of an understatement—two decades ago, he eschewed electrified music because he feared it could hurt a baby's ears—but the writer of "Road Runner" still knows how to have fun. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. No tickets necessary. For more information, call 360-2777. June 29 at 7:30.)

TOSHI REAGON
The fierce and uncompromising Reagon, appearing with her band Big Lovely, once turned down a major record deal because the corporate brass wanted to reshape her image. After years of releasing her records herself, she's found a home on the indie label Razor & Tie. Her latest album, "The Righteous Ones," packs a wallop, and in her live shows she showers audiences with retro funk, urban blues, and folk. (Prospect Park Bandshell, Prospect Park West at 9th St., Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-855-7882, ext. 45. June 30 at 7:30.)

SHAWN COLVIN / BILLY BRAGG
Her 1996 album, "A Few Small Repairs," took home a Grammy and won Colvin long-deserved sales while proving that a gentle folkie could turn divorce into an inspired document of rage. These days, Colvin is a contented new mom, and it's hard to imagine her singing "Get Out of This House" with the same vitriolic fervor. / It's been nearly twenty years since a young lad from Barking, East London, named Billy Bragg started plucking at his guitar and preaching a mix of socialism and romanticism. With the days of Thatcher and Reagan long past, Bragg has been forced to find new heroes. His most recent work has been reinterpreting the words of the folk icon Woody Guthrie with the help of the roots-rock band Wilco (their latest collection of Guthrie interpretations is "Mermaid Avenue Vol. II"). In concert, though, Bragg will be Wilco-less; expect plenty of heartfelt original material and his signature droll banter. (The Lawn at Battery Park. No tickets necessary. July 1 at 3:30.)

TRAGICALLY HIP / JEFF HEALEY BAND
The Canadian rock quintet that's an arena-size phenomenon at home continues to struggle for Stateside success with its ninth disk, "Music @ Work." / Healey, also Canadian, is a blind blues guitarist who used to be a blind blues phenom; back in 1988, he had a hit with his interpretation of the John Hiatt song "Angel Eyes." With **Great Big Sea,** four guys from Newfoundland and their mandolin, accordion, bass, and bodhran (a goatskin drum), who write and perform revved-up pop and chanteys. (Central Park SummerStage. July 1 at 3.)



STEPPING UP *From mid-nineties midnight shows at C.B.'s Gallery to regular stops at Brownies and the Mercury Lounge, the singer and songwriter Peter Salett has used his time on the downtown circuit to hone his rich voice and his emotionally transparent pop sensibility. Last April he enjoyed spending the night on the Bowery Ballroom's grand stage in a show celebrating the completion of his self-produced album, "Heart of Mine," backed by such musicians as the lap steel guitarist Don Piper and the organist Joe McGinty. Salett returns to the same spot this week for a rare solo acoustic performance as the opening act for former Soul Coughing front man M. Doughty. Catch him now, while he's on the rise (see Clubs).*

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

JOAN JETT / SIMI / MARY LOU LORD
Twenty-five years after her work with the seventies all-female band the Runaways made her the original riot grrrl, and nineteen years after "I Love Rock 'n' Roll" made her a wealthy young woman, Joan Jett has become something of a post-punk elder statesperson. She should be especially effective in a holiday setting: for Jett, every day is Independence Day. / The hard-rocking outfit Simi, led by the charismatic electric violinist and guitarist Simmi Sernaker. / Lord, perhaps the world's most successful subway busker, has a crystal-clear voice and experience with unruly crowds, which may come in handy here. (Central Park SummerStage. July 4 at 3.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—June 29: **Bilal,** an up-and-coming soul singer who stole the stage with his bump-and-grind take on Prince's "International Lover" at last year's "Party at the End of Time" concert in the opera house here. July 1: The home-grown Afro-beat of Brooklyn's **Antibalas.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—June 29: The **Tom Tom Club.** Originally conceived as a boredom-busting side project for former Talking Heads husband-and-wife rhythm section Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth, this ad-hoc band made some of the most infectious dance music of the early eighties. On hits like "Wordy Rappinghood" and "Genius of Love," they mixed the syntactics of rap with girl-group whimsy. It's a sound that hasn't been heard since. June 30: **M. Doughty,** the hip-hop-styling, beat-poetry-referencing former singer of Soul Coughing, performs a solo acoustic show. With **Peter Salett.**

CHICAGO B.L.U.E.S.
73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—June 29: The sharp, scratchy guitar of veteran **Hubert Sumlin,** who played in Howlin' Wolf's band for twenty years. June 30: Local singer **Dana Fuchs** turns out world-weary, blues-infused originals that come to life in her burnished voice.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—June 30: The fret meets the turntable: **Praxis** features producer, bassist, and Material founder **Bill Laswell,** the postmodern guitar hero **Buckethead,** and **DJ Disk,** one of the original Invisbl Skratch Picklz.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—June 28: The **Billy Nayer Show.** Cory McAbee, the lead singer of this imaginative combo with a minor cult following, dresses in dark suits and hits the stage like a schizophrenic G-man. He can be collected and calm, but then he's howling, ferreting out clues about love and longing.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—June 28: Atlanta-based vocalist **Jean Carne** makes a rare New York City appearance. Carne (who at various times in her long career has spelled her name without its final "e") once sang on a morning radio show in Georgia while Erroll Garner played the piano. She went on to back Earth, Wind and Fire, and then to release a series of solo albums as a sophisticated Philadelphia-style soul singer. Dining.

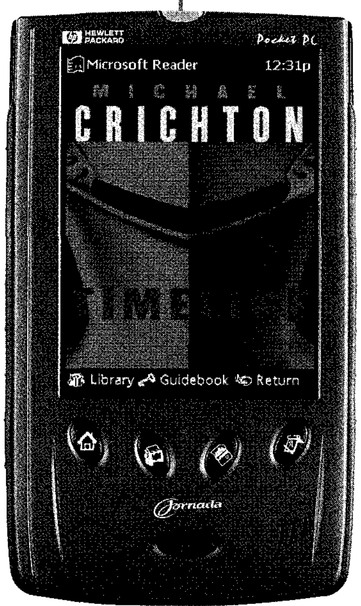
JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—June 28-July 1: The **Holly Hofmann** quartet. Hofmann, an outstanding flutist, hasn't yet reached the luminary status of some of her own band members—particularly the majestic **Ray Brown,** whose monumental bass tone can shake the walls. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through July 2: The **Max Roach** quartet. From bop to free improvisation, drummer Roach has thrown his arms around modern jazz in all its diversity. Fresh from his triumphant duet with Cecil Taylor during the Bell Atlantic Jazz Festival, Roach is leading his stalwart pianoless quartet featuring the protean saxophone of **Odean Pope.**

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through July 2: The **George Coleman** quartet. Coleman is a marvel; there isn't a sax player who knows his instrument

Can your palm do that?



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better, or one who imparts so much knowledge in every marathon solo. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through July 2: The **Tommy Flanagan** trio. Any appearance by the world's finest jazz pianist is delicious enough, but the added treat of drummer **Albert Heath** makes this a gourmet meal. Dining.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—June 30-July 1: **Papo Vázquez,** a hard-driving trombonist who has played with Slide Hampton, Ray Barretto, Chucho Valdes, and Tito Puente, stops by with his band Pirates and Troubadours.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Jazz offspring are doing it for themselves, as proved by saxophonists Joshua Redman and Ravi Coltrane, and by pianist **Kenny Drew, Jr.,** who's here with his trio through July 2. With his florid dashes and prodigious technical displays, Drew doesn't much remind you of his father, the adroit, tasteful bebop pianist. Rather, the younger Drew leans away from restraint and toward the gothic elements of the jazz repertoire. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ZINC BAR
90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—June 27-28: The **Paul Bollenback** quartet. Bollenback might not have the tsunami-force drumming of his regular employer, Jeff (Tain) Watts, behind him, but that may allow the guitarist to relax a bit and show off his talent without fear of being pummelled from behind. He's joined here by the stellar vibraphonist **Joe Locke.** Saturdays and Sundays feature Brazilian jazz.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—The museum is marking the three-hundredth (or three-hundred-and-first, actually—the show originated last year in Paris) anniversary of the birth of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin with an exhibition of more than sixty of the painter's oils and pastels. In an era when artists gained their reputation on the strength of vast historical canvases, Chardin commanded attention with sensuous still-lifes and humble domestic scenes. Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Other Pictures: Vernacular Photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection"** brings together more than eighty images from the teens through the sixties by unknown shutterbugs whose works conjure the style of famous contemporaries (Cartier-Bresson, Frank, Moholy-Nagy). Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"American Modern, 1925-40: Design for a New Age."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **John Singer Sargent: Beyond the Portrait Studio."** Paintings, drawings, and watercolors from the collection. Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Now! Modern Photographs from the Permanent Collection."** Through Oct. 22. ♦ **"After Nicolas Poussin: New Etchings by Leon Kossoff."** Through Aug. 13. ♦ **"Art and Oracle: Spirit Voices of Africa."** Through July 30. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Projects 72: John Armleder/Piotr Uklański"** presents two installations based on disco theatrics: Armleder has hung and spotlit a dozen whirling mirrored balls in the MOMA café, and Uklański has set up a sound-activated, illuminated dance floor in the sculpture garden. Through Sept. 5 and Aug. 1, respectively. ♦ **"Making Choices."** The twenty-four-part show concentrates on works made between 1920 and 1960, drawn exclusively from the museum's extensive holdings, in a series of tightly focussed exhibitions, several devoted to a single artist (Man Ray, Cartier-Bresson, Morandi). Closing, in stages, on Aug. 22, Sept. 19, and Sept. 26. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"1900: Art at the Crossroads"** reopens a sort of art-world time capsule, contrasting representative works from the movements that took shape at the beginning of the past century. Established masters (Bouguereau, Burne-Jones, Degas, Eakins, Gauguin, and Munch) are displayed near the upstarts of the day (Kandinsky, Matisse, Mondrian, and Picasso). Through Sept. 10. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—**"The Art of Alice Neel,"** the museum's second retrospective devoted to the artist, and the first since her death, in 1984, offers seventy-five paintings and watercolors, including likenesses of artists (Andy Warhol, Robert Smithson), writers (Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Fearing), and family. Through Sept. 17. ♦ **"Carnival Strippers: Photographs by Susan Meiselas."** A Magnum photographer best known for her harrowing depictions of ravaged areas in Central America and Kurdistan, Meiselas began her career documenting a different kind of war zone—carnival striptease shows. In 1972, just one year after she started taking pictures, the artist spent the first of three summers travelling the circuit in rural New England. The strippers, from the days before silicone and StairMasters, look heartbreakingly real in these small black-and-white photographs. Then again, so do the customers: the slack-jawed rapture on the male faces in "Tentful of Marks" is vulnerability incarnate. Through Sept. 10. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The Triassic equivalent of professional wrestling is here: **"Fighting Dinosaurs"** showcases one of the greatest paleontological finds of the past century. In the Gobi Desert almost thirty years ago, a Polish-Mongolian team came across the remains of two dinosaurs, a carnivorous velociraptor and a vegetarian protoceratops, apparently caught in a brawl to the death. More recent finds, including early mammals and new links between dinosaurs and birds, are also on view, along with video projections, a diorama, and chip-away re-creations of digs. Oddly enough, it was geopolitics as much as shovels and picks which brought most of this kiddie catnip to light: Mongolia's post-Soviet independence allowed American scientists to return to the region they had first excavated in the twenties. Through Oct. 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Dream Days: The Art of Maxfield Parrish."** The Philadelphia artist (1870-1966) remains enormously popular, and it's not hard to figure out why. "It doesn't mean an earthly thing," Parrish said of one of his murals. "The endeavor is to present a painting which will give pleasure without tiring the intellect: something beautiful to look upon." Examples include rose-lipped maidens in diaphanous gowns, moonlight over snow-laden outbuildings, merry figures out of Mother Goose, a nude youth on a swing before an ivory castle. Parrish was a hit-maker, and his show is a blast—and about as far as an institution can get from "Sensation." Through Aug. 6. ♦ **"William Merritt Chase: Modern American Landscapes, 1886-1890."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

ILYA KABAKOV
"How can you make yourself better, kinder, more decent?" asks N. Solomatkin, a Soviet taxi-driver and character in Ilya Kabakov's latest narrative installation, which presents utopian visions from fictional citizens of a sweetly nostalgic and completely imaginary Siberia. Dubbed "The Palace of Projects," this floodlit, wood-framed nautilus covered in translucent white mesh collects sixty-five proposals for better living in a three-story, forty-foot-high archive that's equal parts "Monument to the Third International" and Tower of Babel. Kabakov's characters illustrate their neurotic, touching vignettes and their recipes for world harmony and self-realization with scale models, paintings, and writings, and the artist provides tables and chairs for leisurely appreciation (itself a utopian gesture in today's restless art world). While the taxi-driver recommends donning a pair of handmade angel's wings, other homemade schemes from these hard-luck Russians include plans for night-lights that would cover an entire Russian region and open-air toilets installed on mountainsides. Through July 13. (69th Regiment Armory, Lexington Ave. at 26th St. For information, call the Public Art Fund at 980-4575.)

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE
This South African artist is best known for soulful, politically charged animated films based on his own charcoal drawings. The high point of this gallery show is a cavalcade of bronze sculptures snaking across a tabletop, a ragtag crew that evokes a diaspora or an exodus. Though none of Kentridge's films are included, the implication of motion lurks in the screws and wing nuts welded occasionally to a figure's knee or elbow. Through July 14. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.)

Short List

EUGENIE BAIZERMAN
Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223.
Through July 28.

JAMES LEE BYARS
Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 988-1623.
Through Aug. 11.

STAN DANN
Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 987-4997.
Through July 21.

BETSABÉE ROMERO
Galeria Ramis Barquet, 41 E. 57th St.
644-9090. Through Sept. 2.

DONALD SULTAN
Mary Ryan, 24 W. 57th St. 397-0669.
Through July 28.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

CARLA KLEIN
Klein's two all-aqua postcard scenes of an impressive suspension bridge and of the darkened reflections of an underwater swimming pool dominate the main room here. Some earlier work whose subject is cadavers lies in wait in a smaller side gallery, to disrupt any foolish perception of the artist as a landscape painter or a lightweight. Through July 14. (Bondakar Jankou, 521 W. 21st St. 414-4144.)

JULIA SCHER
Cross a Betty Crocker kitchen with a NASA laboratory and you get some idea of this artist-slash-security maven's latest work. Scher, who teaches a course at M.I.T. on surveillance, turns her attention to the microwave, "a technology that cooks without warmth, yet burns the flesh and eyes." Ovens, ranging from off-the-shelf brands to customized models the color of Pepto-Bismol, are scattered around the gallery (as are fire extinguishers). Some appear to heat small, anatomically correct human figures, while one apparently pops popcorn. Scher lampoons everything from domesticity to so-called "smart" technology in this fun-house installation of a show. Through July 14. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.)

"INNUENDO"
This group of works on sexual ambiguity includes a gouache by John Wesley of two pairs of tangled legs with all twenty toenails painted red, a very early and oddly undistorted John Currin portrait, and a huge "Gothic Revival" bed by Brian Tolle—built out of church pews and their red pleather run-

ners, it refers both to prayer and to heretical bedtime acrobatics. Alongside all this activity, a notable triumvirate of female photographers offers up the smooth skin of young Everyteens in three color pictures: Dana Hoey's "Assumption," set on a beach; Collier Schorr's "Blair Academy," depicting a wrestling match; and Jessica Craig Martin's "Speedboat Orgy, Venice," whose eyebrow-raising title makes its subtlety surprising. Through July 22. (Dee Glasoe, 529 W. 20th St. 924-7545.)

"MAXIMAL MINIMAL"
This group show offers the present, if not the future, of nonfigurative painting, and makes it look good enough to eat. Giles Lyon's "Ripple" provides gobstoppers of paint, cut open to reveal tree-ring-like circles of color; and the icing on Dennis Hollingsworth's "Fantastic Voyage" would make Martha Stewart jealous. Standouts in other art-on-the-wall media include Jeremy Blake's digital C-print "Guccinam," Bernard Hildebrandts' dark-blue square of enamel on canvas, and Charles Spurrier's fingerprinted, pinwheel-planted "Ignition," in tape, pigment, wood, adhesive, vinyl, plastic, and steel. Through Aug. 4. (Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.)

Short List

LAYLAH ALI
303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.
Through July 7.

DEBORAH BUTTERFIELD
Thorp, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St.
691-6565. Through July 28.

ROBERTO JUAREZ
Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 366-4774.
Through July 28.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ
Liebman Magnan, 552 W. 24th St. 255-3225.
Through July 28.

SIMON UNGERS
Urbach Architecture, 526 W. 26th St.
627-0974. Through July 21.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

ELLEN BIRKENBLITT
Winsome reveries disguised as drawings and paintings, populated by lions and tigers and bears and a ubiquitous brown-haired sylph. The drawings have the dreamy haze of an afternoon nap, while the paintings—equal parts abstraction and depiction—have a lyrical ferocity. Their jagged brushstrokes and vivid palette recall Kandinsky by way of early Walt Disney. A charming show. Through July 15. (Kern, 558 Broadway. 965-1706.)

"NEO"
For its annual exhibition of emerging artists, Exit Art's roundup of the year's best studio visits purportedly presents "new approaches to art making" while still indulging in some fairly dated art habits. Containing the work of some twenty-one youngish artists, "Neo" veers wildly in both inspiration and perspiration. David Henderson's computer-plotted, layered-plywood sculptures are space-age Brancusis band-sawed from humble materials. Anna Ehrsam and Hilary Koob-Sassen's huge steel sculptures are overwrought, both physically and metaphorically, in the manner of Louise Bourgeois's ugliest heavy-metal sculptures. Talent still abounds—Scott Reynolds' funny inflatable sculptures, Elizabeth Zwada's obsessive, number-laden, Magic Marker paintings, David Opdyke's ecological sculptures made from Home Depot materials—but this exhibition is strictly hit or miss. Through Aug. 19. (Exit Art, 548 Broadway. 966-7745.)

"SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION"
"What can a fellow do in an age of decadence like ours? Great painting has gone out of fashion." What may sound like Hilton Kramer carping in the New York *Observer* is actually a line from Flaubert's classic novel, detailing the disillusionment of a young artist in nineteenth-century Paris. Curator David Rimanelli invites a dozen artists to mull over the masterpiece with results ranging from homage (Jonathan Hammer binds the volume as an art-school yearbook) to flights of fancy (video artist Alex Bag casts salmonella as a character in a puppet show). Don't miss Patterson Beckwith's sly color portraits of the molten core of art-world cool (sitters include painter-cum-cover girl Elizabeth Peyton) and Delia Brown's updated vanitas still-lifes. Through July 29. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)

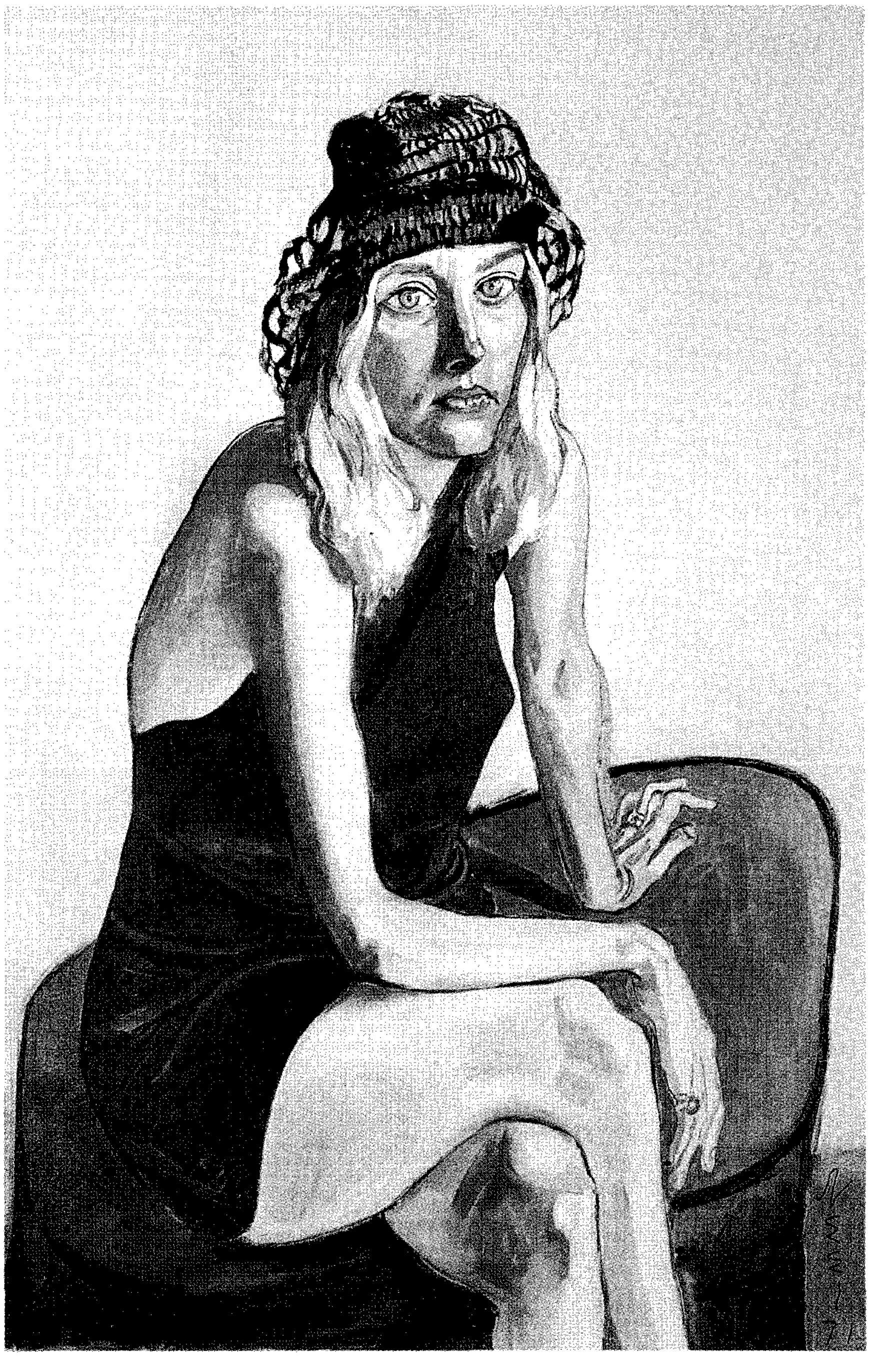
Short List

KEVIN WIXTED
Beitzel, 102 Prince St. 219-2863.
Through July 14.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

SASHA CHERMAYEFF
Sensual, highly rhythmic abstractions featuring thick, ropelike, undulating forms. Chermayeff's diaphanous strands crisscross like snaking Medusa tentacles. Using a roller, wood-block ink, and rice paper, the artist turns her seaweedy threads into hilly, indistinct horizons or, alternately, fluid microörganisms. Painted in translucent tones of sky blue, blood red, gray, and emerald, Chermayeff's modestly sized works hold the eye by means of an ambiguous drama further evoked by her titles: "Water as Thick as Blood," "Lost in the Kelp," and "Impact" refer to the final moments of John Kennedy, Jr., who was her close friend and to whom the show is dedicated. Through July 8. (Farrell/Pollack, 212 Berry St. 718-599-0844.)

MATT BLACKWELL
An exhibition of nostalgic, entropic paintings of big cars of the sixties and seventies. Blackwell focuses on decaying masculinity: over time, the size, power, and speed of once sexy LTDs and Caddys depreciate into mere heft, turning muscle cars into metaphors for male menopause. Blackwell's symbols of passé machismo are pictured rusted, pocked and abandoned, out of gas and out of hope. Joining expressionistic paint handling to the theme of failed utopia, his cobalt-and-navy



A portrait of Louise Lieber, by Alice Neel, from her Whitney Museum retrospective.

"Cadillac for John Brown" is painted with a ripped canvas top, rusted wheel bolts and half its front grille (or teeth) missing. Another large painting, "Caddy for Cormac," a discolored blue land yacht painted against an apocalyptic pink sky, makes explicit the artist's intent to "conjure up the settings of a Cormac McCarthy novel." Through July 17. (Pierogi 2000, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

STUART KLIPPER
Through the National Science Foundation's Artists and Writers Program, Klipper has accompanied research teams to Antarctica six times over the past fourteen years. His large, panoramic views find surprising color in the white-on-white icescape, and convincing, if unsurprising, majesty in icebergs. Through July 7. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

DYLAN STONE
There's nothing here but a map on the wall and a set of filing cabinets, which Stone has begun to fill with "Drugstore Photographs." The title refers to the artist's processing method rather than his subject matter, which is Manhattan—block by block, every block, all 2,500 of them, by his estimate. So far, he has covered only a fraction of the city, from Peter Minuit Plaza to the Lower East Side. A small back room full of urban architectural photography by other artists (including Dan Graham, Roy Arden, and John Pilsone) provides a welcome counterpoint of edited, professionally printed images. Through July 7. (Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 243-3335.)

MARLA SWEENEY
Sweeney documents small-town Texans on their own turf, amidst their houses, dogs, sixties-era ambulances, and Civil War reënactments. The prints, which the artist does herself, are saturated with color and a liveliness that doesn't entirely cancel out their pathos. Through July 12. (Gallery 24, at 552 W. 24th St. 414-0370.)

JUERGEN TELLER
The man who discovered Kate Moss takes advantage of fine-art photography's current fascination with the methods and look of fashion shoots ("Lights, camera, inaction!") to slip some models and beauty queens into the art market. His "Miss Worlds" offers huge, harshly flash-lit portraits of the 1999 contestants in that pageant. "Go-Sees" chronicles, less formally, a year of meetings with aspiring models. Through July 28. (Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753.)

"RODEO USA"
This group show includes work by Jean Laughton, who photographs rodeo types in front of painted scenic backdrops; Sandra Nydegger, who catches contestants and celebrants on the East Coast riding circuit; and Louise Serpa, whose thirty-five-plus years of in-the-ring action photography recently got her inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame. Through July 8. (E3 Gallery, 47 E. 3d St. 982-0882.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—**"Testimony"** surveys James Nachtwey's career as a documentary photographer from 1981 to the present. Through July 23. ♦ **"A Durable Memento"** presents daguerreotypes of places (Connecticut, Liberia) and people (John Brown) taken by Augustus Washington, the son of a former slave. Through Sept. 24. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

MAUDE SCHUYLER CLAY
Meyerowitz, 580 Broadway. 625-3434.
Through July 14.

GUNTHER FORG
Burgin, 243 W. 18th St. 462-2668.
Through July 14.

TOKIHIRO SATO
Tonkonow, 601 W. 26th St. 255-8450.
Through July 28.

ROCKY SCHENCK
Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.
Through July 7.

"SNAPSHOTS"
Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444.
Through July 21.

"UNCONSCIOUS DOCUMENTARIES"
Von Lintel & Nusser, 555 W. 25th St.
242-0599. Through July 15.

See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA
This company, conducted by Vincent La Selva, has spent the last six summers working chronologically through the catalogue of Verdi's operas, an unprecedented enterprise that now reaches its seventh season, comprising four works of dark-hued high Romanticism. The first of this summer's offerings is "Un Ballo in Maschera," which Verdi and his librettist, Antonio Somma, based on the 1792 assassination of King Gustavus III of Sweden. But the papal censors, who called the shots in matters theatrical in Verdi's day, decided that, given the fragile state of Italian politics, it would be dangerous to enact the murder onstage. As a result, the audience at the Roman première, in 1859, saw the action unroll in Colonial Massachusetts, with the King of Sweden transformed into the Governor of Boston and his killer changed from the historical Captain Anckarström into a Creole secretary with the unlikely name of Renato. Mr. La Selva, who regularly takes delight in staging rarely aired editions of well-known works, here opts for the original Boston "Ballo," instead of the frequently heard restoration to the Swedish setting. Featuring soprano Katherine Harris, mezzo-soprano Marisa Galvany, tenor Enrico di Giuseppe, and baritone Raemond Martin. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. June 28 at 7:30. No tickets necessary. In case of rain, the performance will take place on July 3 at 7:30.)

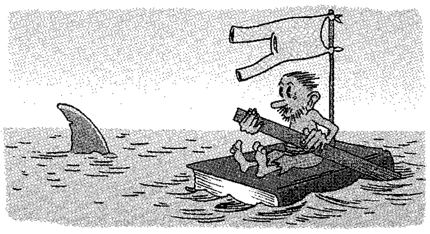
CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY OPERA
Stanley Walden, best known as one of the composers of the Broadway show "Oh! Calcutta!," wrote his opera "Kafka: Letter to My Father" in 1995, on a commission from the Bremer Theatre in Bremen, Germany. Its subject is intense: the libretto is derived from a hundred-page letter Kafka wrote to his father, trying to make sense of their tortured relationship. These performances mark the première of the opera's English version, conducted by Richard Marshall. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. June 28-29 at 8.)

OPERAWORKS
The company's season ends with two multiple bills of short dramatic works, fully (if modestly) staged and accompanied by synthesizer. June 29 and July 1: Vaughan Williams's "Riders to the Sea" and Stravinsky's "The Nightingale." ♦ June 30: Louis Gruenberg's "The Creation," Satie's "Socrates," and Peter Maxwell Davies's "Our Lady of the Flowers." (Raw Space Theatre, 529 W. 42nd St. Evenings at 8. For information about tickets, call 873-9531.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC
June 29 and July 1 at 7:30: Clarinettist Charles Neidich, violinist Rolfe Schulte, cellist Fred Sherry, and pianist James Winn team up for a program that comprises Stravinsky's "Suite Italienne," "Three Pieces for Clarinet," and "L'Hi-

BOOK CURRENTS
Risky Business



If there's anything that the success of "Survivor" proves, it's that audiences love to watch the arduous struggle of man against nature—preferably from a safe distance. But true daredevils like their peril without media intervention.

In 1997, the adventure writer W. Hodding Carter found himself and the crew of the Snorri—the tippy, square-rigged replica of a Viking ship he built to re-create the voyage of Leif Eriksson—gliding straight toward an iceberg off the Greenland coast. "Either we were about to die and mercifully end this absurd adventure," Carter writes, "or, worse, we would live to be tortured for another day." Carter, the son of former State Department spokesman Hodding Carter, lived to be tortured for another day, and **A VIKING VOYAGE** (Ballantine) relates his sometimes hilarious, sometimes harrowing story.

Those with a penchant for risky behavior but no firsthand expertise may want to consult **THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURE SOURCEBOOK** (National Geographic). Author Paul McMenamin is hardly an armchair quarterback; he has risked his own neck repeatedly, whether rafting the Zambesi or scaling steep rock faces without the help of a rope. Here, he offers advice on various perilous activities, from the familiar (hang gliding) to the slightly less familiar (hang gliding down the inner wall of a dormant volcano).

For campside—or cliffside—reading, the newest volume of George MacDonald's "Flashman" series, which recounts the escapades of the "celebrated Victorian soldier, scoundrel, amorist, and self-confessed poltroon," is ideal. In **FLASHMAN AND THE TIGER** (Knopf), Flashy plots the undoing of Tiger Jack Moran, a "high-tailed gun-slick with a beltful of scalps who can shoot your ears off with his eyes shut."

—*Liesl Schillinger*

TONY MILLIONAIRE

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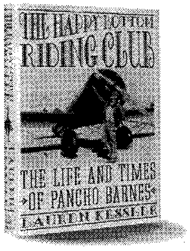
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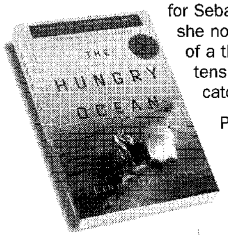
Perhaps the world's only woman to captain a swordfishing boat, Greenlaw has succeeded in one of the most male-dominated and dangerous professions in the world. Recognized as the primary source for Sebastian Junger's bestseller *The Perfect Storm*, she now tells her own story—a breathtaking account of a thirty-day voyage in which she explores the tensions among the crew, the exhilaration of the catch and the majesty of the sea. (Hyperion)



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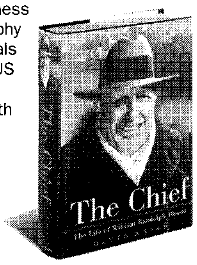

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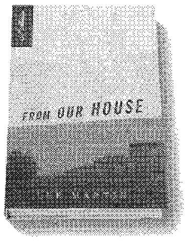
FROM OUR HOUSE

by Lee Martin

In a revealing memoir, the award-winning author of the short story collection *The Least You Need to Know* describes the emotional landscape of his rural American childhood. A sensitive boy whose father lost both hands in a farming accident, Martin writes candidly about their differences and the struggles between fathers and sons. (Dutton)



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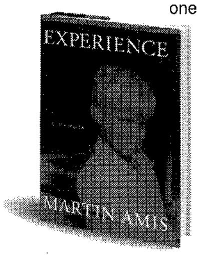
The acclaimed author of *London Fields* explores his reputation as one of Britain's most distinctive yet controversial writers and his legacy as the son of the great Kingsley Amis. Among anecdotes on the British and American literary scene, Amis dispenses pen portraits of Salman Rushdie, Elizabeth Jane Howard, Saul Bellow, and other literary figures. (Talk Miramax Books)



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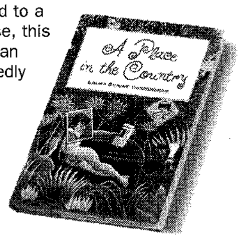
by Laura Shaine Cunningham

The author of the highly praised *Sleeping Arrangements* returns with another wryly humorous memoir, one that addresses the perennial dream of escape, of retreating from the world to a place of rural splendor. In Cunningham's case, this translates into an escape from the Bronx to an upstate New York farm, where she determinedly pursues the rustic dreams of her city-bred childhood. (Riverhead Books)



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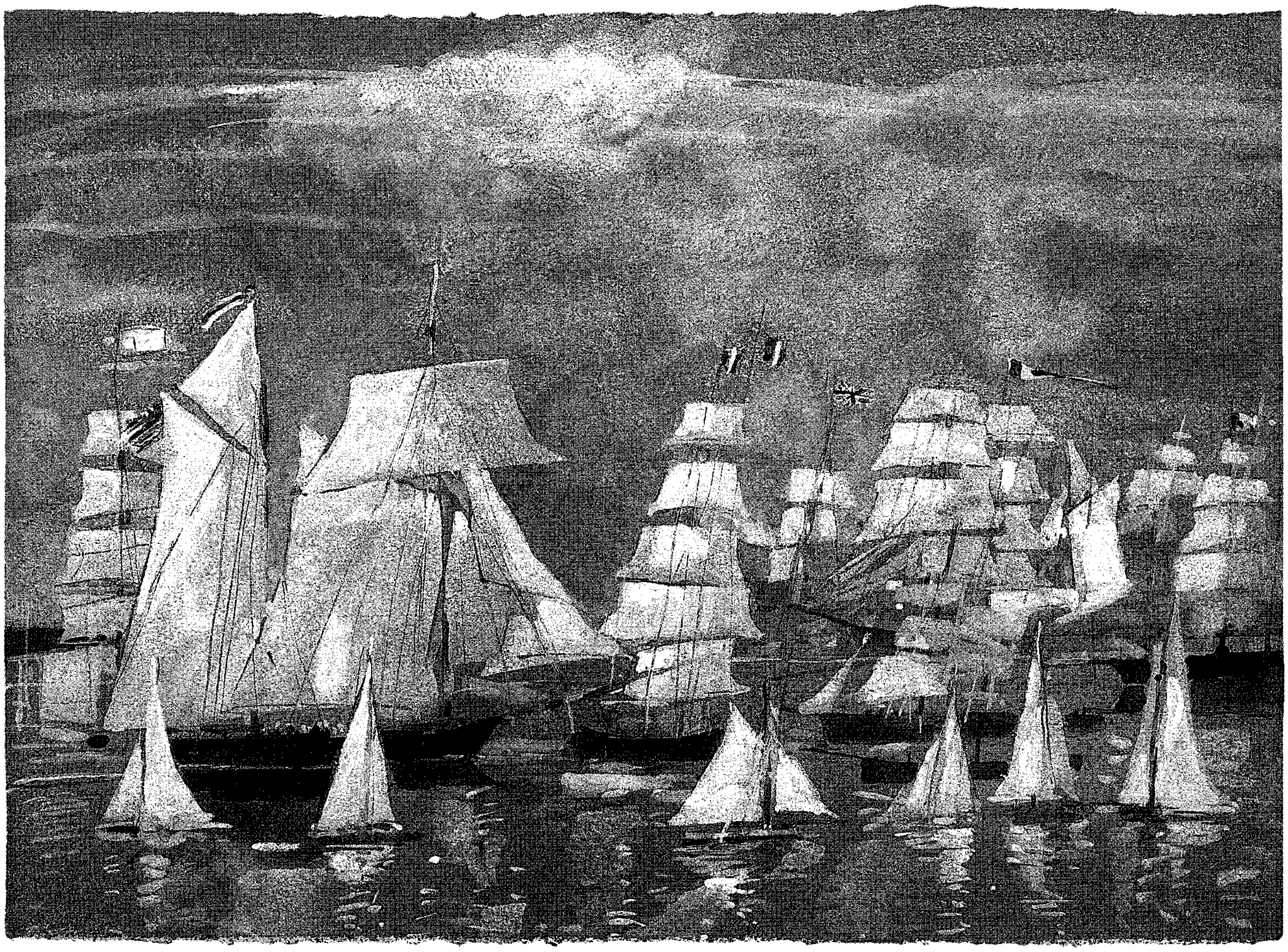


Canvas and spars: The tall ships of OpSail 2000 fill the waters of New York Harbor over the July Fourth weekend.

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

stoire du Soldat" (in the composer's 1919 arrangement for clarinet trio), as well as Carter's "Gra" and Beethoven's Piano Trio in B-Flat Major (Op. 11). ♦ June 30 at 7:30 and July 2 at 4: Mr. Schulte reprises a work he premièred at Harvard last fall, the "Fantasy—Remembering Roger," composed by Elliott Carter in memory of Roger Sessions. Also on the program are Stravinsky's "Duo Concertant" (with Mr. Winn assisting), Bach's D-Major Viola da Gamba Sonata (with Messrs. Sherry and Winn), and Schumann's D-Minor Piano Trio. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

SUMMERGARDEN
Every summer, the Museum of Modern Art's sculpture garden comes alive on Friday and Saturday evenings with the sounds of modern music played by adventurous students from the Juilliard School (whose resident contemporary-music guru, Joel Sachs, oversees the ever-invigorating programming). This year's series, which continues through Aug. 19, focusses on how composers have employed influences from their national heritages within the general framework of the European classical tradition—an especially important paradigm governing the music of the recent fin de siècle. In the opening program, Mr. Sachs leads the New Juilliard Ensemble in four works for chamber orchestra: "Flor de Tremembé," for an ensemble of European and Brazilian instruments, by the late Brazilian composer Mozart Camargo Guarnieri, whose name itself speaks volumes about multiculturalism; "Peregrine," by the Bolivian Agustín Fernández; "Inscriptions on Bone," by Guo Wenjing (who serves as dean of the Beijing Central Conservatory); and a relative classic, Charles Ives's Symphony No. 3, subtitled "The Camp Meeting" because of its liberal quotations from Protestant hymns. (14 W. 54th St. June 30 and July 1 at 8:30. No tickets necessary.)

WOLFRAM KOESSEL
The cellist plays sonatas by Beethoven (in A Major) and François Francoeur, with pianist Ilan Rechtman assisting. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. July 2 at noon.)

BRONX ARTS ENSEMBLE
Presenting an Independence Day salute to George M. Cohan, Duke Ellington, and other American composers. (Rockwood Drive Circle, Van Cortlandt Park, Broadway at Mosholu Ave., the Bronx. July 4 at 2. No tickets necessary. In case of rain, the concert will be held at the Church of the Mediator, Kingsbridge Ave. at 231st St.)

OUT OF TOWN

A selective listing of festival events within a reasonable drive from New York City.

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The last of the company's free, outdoor concert performances for this season, which includes its first-ever alfresco performances in the Nutmeg State. **"Rigoletto,"** with Youngok Shin, Roberto Aronica, Carlo Guelfi, and Dimitri Kavrakos; conducted by Nello Santi. (Brookdale Park, Montclair, N.J. June 28. ♦ Waterloo Village, Stanhope, N.J. July 1.) ♦ **"Madama Butterfly,"** with Georgina Lukács, Wendy White, Paul Charles Clarke, and William Stone; Julius Rudel. (New Haven Green, New Haven, Conn. June 30.) ♦ **Note:** All performances begin at 8. No tickets necessary. For rain-date information, call 212-362-6000.

OPERA FESTIVAL OF NEW JERSEY
June 28 at 7:30 and June 30 at 8: "Falstaff," with baritone Mark Delavan in the title role. ♦ July 1 at 8: "Carmen," featuring Suzanna Guzmán in the title role. (McCarter Theatre, 91 University Pl., Princeton, N.J. 609-258-2787.)

CARAMOOR
June 29 at 4:30: For those who find themselves free of a weekday afternoon, a recital by up-and-comers Alisa Weilerstein (cellist) and David Lawton (pianist), performing sonatas by Brahms and Rachmaninoff, as well as pieces by Chopin and Dave Heath. ♦ June 30 at 8: Four singers and two pianists join for a wide-ranging recital that includes Brahms's "Liebeslieder" Waltzes. ♦ July 1 at 8:30: The singer Andrea Marcovicci is backed by the Orchestra of St. Luke's in classics of American popular song. ♦ July 2 at 4:30: The Orchestra of St. Luke's presents an all-Vivaldi concert as the keystone of Caramoor's afternoon-long Venetian Festival (which includes an appearance by the commedia-dell'arte troupe I Giullari di Piazza). (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

TANGLEWOOD
The festival's season doesn't officially open until July 7, but a prelude week boasts several enticements. June 30 at 8:30: The Boston Symphony Chamber Players perform Mozart's D-Major Flute Quartet, Janáček's "Mládi," and Brahms's Serenade No. 1 (in its chamber reduction). ♦ July 2 at 2:30: Works by Britten, Copland, and Mozart, with the Boston Symphony Chamber Players. ♦ July 2 at 8:30: The Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra performs Copland's "Grohg," Elgar's "Enigma Variations," and other works, with Seiji Ozawa, André Previn, and Robert Spano taking turns on the podium. ♦ July 3 at 8:30: Mr. Ozawa leads the Tanglewood Music Center Fellows in Bach's "Magnificat," among other works. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
July 1 at 8: The distinguished pianist Grant Johannesen, noted especially as an exponent of French music, performs seven short pieces by Debussy, in

addition to works by Bach, Chopin, and Beethoven (his "Eroica" Variations). ♦ July 2 at 3: The Miami String Quartet plays Haydn's "Reiter" Quartet (Op. 74, No. 3), Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" Quartet, and, with oboist Humbert Lucarelli assisting, the première of Robert Starer's "Maverick Variations." Written to celebrate the festival's eighty-fifth anniversary, Mr. Starer's piece, for oboe quartet, develops an "M & M" motif, with each movement carrying a designation such as "Melismatic Monologue," "Mini-Minuetti," and "Metric Memoir." Mr. Lucarelli rounds out the program by playing a transcription for oboe (in G Minor) of Bach's B-Minor Partita (BWV 1013), originally for unaccompanied flute. (Woodstock, N.Y. 914-679-8217.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
July 1 at 8: The Jacques Thibaud Trio is unusual among chamber groups for its insistence on playing from memory, without the security blanket of a printed score. Doubtless that's what they'll do when they essay Beethoven's G-Major String Trio (Op. 9, No. 1) in this recital. But what will happen when they are joined by Justin Blasdale for Mozart's G-Minor Piano Quartet and when double-bassist Alvin Brehm completes the ensemble for Hummel's E-Flat-Major Piano Quintet? (We're betting on music stands.) ♦ July 2 at 3: The same performers offer Beethoven's C-Minor String Trio (Op. 9, No. 3), Mozart's Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major, and Schubert's "Trout" Quintet. (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

SHIPPING OUT FOR THE FOURTH
"Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries," wrote Herman Melville in "Moby Dick," describing a mid-nineteenth-century weekend afternoon in lower Manhattan. "These are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. . . . What do they here?" They were attracted to the sea, what Melville called "the ungraspable phantom of life," and to the sailing ships that ringed the island. The scene this Independence Day is sure to be similar, as OpSail 2000 brings a hundred and fifty tall ships—the high-masted sailing vessels of Melville's day—to New York Harbor. The highlight is a parade of sailing ships, led by the United States Coast Guard's barque Eagle, which starts at 9:45 A.M. at the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and runs up the Hudson River to the George Washington Bridge. Battery Park is an excellent viewing point. The tall ships will remain here through July 9 and will be docked at the South Street Seaport and other places around town, where they will be open to the public. New Yorkers who want to get an early look at the ships, or a jump on the rest of the harbor action, should save July 3, from 11:30 to 2, for an excursion aboard Bertha, a 1925 tugboat that will be taking adventurous swimmers to the southern tip of Governors Island. (The tugboat trip is organized by the Working Waterfront Association and Swim the Apple, two groups dedicated to waterfront access in the five boroughs.) Early landlubber activities include a free concert by the New York Pops at the World Trade Center Plaza on July 3 at 7:30. For more information about OpSail, call 435-2665. For details about the swimming trip, call 505-0694. ♦ **Note:** There is also an international naval review in the Hudson River on July 4 starting at 8 A.M. For more information, call 646-557-7200.

TALKS
June 28 at 1: Robert Parks, a curator at the Morgan Library, discusses Saint-Exupéry's manuscripts and drawings for "The Little Prince." (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 333.) ♦ June 29 at 12:30: Artist Garland Farwell talks about and demonstrates the full-body puppets he makes for the Batoto Yetu dance company. (Courtyard Gallery, World Financial Center, Battery Park City. For more information, call 528-2733.)

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

On the Eastern Front

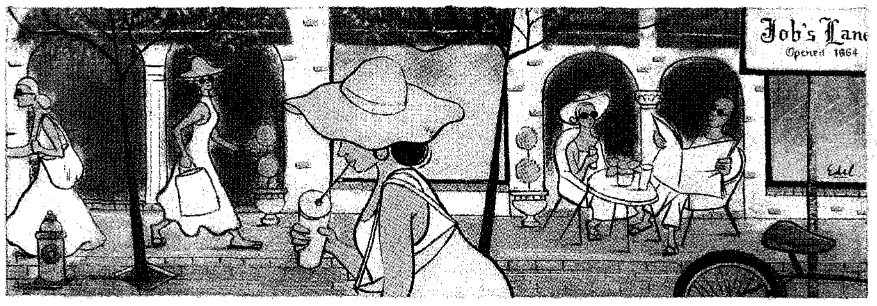
Compared to the frenetic activity that has lately defined summer on the eastern end of Long Island—the travails of jitney travel, the pursuit of a good table at a good restaurant—an afternoon spent visiting the local shops can be viewed as positively restorative.

Southampton's venerable **HILDRETH'S** (51 Main St.; 631-283-2300) has been dressing up Hamptons homes since 1842, long before anyone was worried about reservations and traffic. Alongside country-house perennials like seersucker coverlets and wicker chaises are less predictable resort whimsies: lobster-claw-shaped pot holders ($9.95); red, white, and blue tea towels decorated with lighthouses and sailboats ($5.50); and stalk-shaped porcelain dishes that advertise the region's corn crop ($7.95). Just up the street, **STEVEN STOLMAN** (83 Main St.; 631-283-8602) offers the sartorial equivalent of a jaunty pot holder: clothes made from fabrics intended for upholstery, such as Scalamandre and Brunschwig & Fils weaves. The results include a simple sleeveless shift of white-and-china-blue toile de Jouy printed with a pattern of a jalopy, a kid on a bike, and a run-down wooden house that, in these parts, would probably sell in the five-million-dollar range ($325).

The moguls buying up those shanties might want to celebrate particularly impressive weekend grosses with something from **HOLLIS REH & SHARIFF** (2 Job's Lane; 631-283-6653), whose glittering window across from the Parrish Museum has been enticing passersby since 1985—not exactly up there with Hildreth's, but a lifetime on Job's Lane, where new stores pop up every summer. A platinum brooch from the nineteen-thirties which features sixteen carats of baguette and round diamonds arrayed in a three-inch curve reminiscent of a spray of ocean foam is $37,000, or about the same price as a gunite pool. Over in East Hampton, at **CHRISTOPHER FISCHER** (67 Main St.; 631-907-0900), long, low tables hold men's cashmere V-neck pullovers in a spectrum of appealing, muted hues, from pale lavender to blanched persimmon. Around the corner, the **MONOGRAM SHOP** (11 Newton Lane; 631-329-3379) looks like the kind of place that has been embroidering for the local gentry for decades. In fact, it has been open for business for only three years. A linen-covered tissue box is $35; a toddler's piqué frock is $60 (the shop sample reads "Jacqueline"). The fee for monogramming these and the shop's many other offerings is $20; it costs the same, according to the proprietress, no matter whether "you want one initial or the Gettysburg Address."

Gentle sweaters and elegant monogramming are about the last things you'll find in Montauk; instead of diamond sprays and hankie coffers, the stores here favor live eels and sinister-sounding "body jewelry," clearly not intended for the traditional destinations of wrist and earlobe. At **WHITE'S OF MONTAUK** (95 on the Plaza; 631-668-2994), the usual panoply of T-shirts, flip-flops, and baseball caps sits alongside a pendant billed as a genuine mako shark's tooth, which is dressed up with a few beads and suspended from a black cord ($19). If the tooth is too creepy, there's also a miniature shark, about eight inches long, with a fierce but conspicuously rubber set of chompers ($1.99). It appears quite willing to spend the off-season in the trunk of the car, ready to serve as a reminder of summers past and an inspiration for summers to come.

—*Lynn Yaeger*



EDEL RODRIGUEZ

MOVIES OPENING

THE ADVENTURES OF ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE
An adaptation of the cartoon by Jay Ward, which mixes live action and animation. Robert De Niro is Fearless Leader, Rene Russo is Natasha, and Jason Alexander is Boris. Directed by Des McAnuff. Opening June 30.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU
Heather Matarazzo ("Welcome to the Dollhouse") falls under the spell of a local snoop in an upstate-New York bus station, in this drama adapted from stories by Joyce Carol Oates. Directed by Lisanne Skyler. Opening June 28. (Film Forum.)

THE PATRIOT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening June 28.

THE PERFECT STORM
Sebastian Junger's nonfiction book is adapted for the big screen under the direction of Wolfgang Petersen, with George Clooney as the captain of the doomed fishing boat. Opening June 30.

PRAISE
A twenty-five-year-old Australian slacker and a pudgy nymphomaniac spiral into an indulgent, obsessive relationship in this film directed by John Curran. Opening June 30. (The Screening Room.)

TRIXIE
A dark comedy directed by Alan Rudolph, about a casino guard (Emily Watson) who uncovers the wrongdoings of a state senator (Nick Nolte) in a small resort town. With Nathan Lane and Dermot Mulroney. Opening June 28.

FILM NOTES

If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.

AMERICAN PIMP
A relatively straightforward documentary that charts, in lurid, gritty color, one of the more constant and perplexing real-life metaphors in American cultural life—the black pimp. The Hughes brothers, who made their name with "Menace II Society," a rather sentimental evocation of ghetto life in Los Angeles, don't have any big ideas here, either. The film is an indictment of and a romance about black male life, à la Robert Mapplethorpe's totemic portraits of black male genitalia, and only incidentally reveals the paradox of pimphood: the terror, self-importance, and ultimate impotence inherent in being powerful in a small, underground patch of the American dream. The movie is too clinical to be poetic and too solipsistic to be insightful; the most arresting thing about it is the language of the denizens of the night, which amounts to a form of jazz.—*Hilton Als* (Cinema Village and Empire 25.)

BIG MOMMA'S HOUSE
Another strained urban comedy, this one starring Martin Lawrence as an F.B.I. agent who dresses in three-hundred-pound drag to catch an escaped convict. What separates this film from the genre's usual fodder is a particularly strong cast: Lawrence, along with Paul Giamatti, Nia Long, and the always exceptional Terrence Howard, gives the film a vulgar energy. It's a shame that their efforts are wasted on a script that's an intermittently funny cut-and-paste job, taking elements from earlier popular movies ("Mrs. Doubtfire," "The Nutty Professor"). An actor as dangerously funny as Lawrence deserves better.—*Bruce Diones* (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

CHICKEN RUN
Nick Park and his Aardman studio have enslaved a generation of children, young and old, with the "Wallace & Gromit" shorts, which use an arduous clay animation technique in the service of a comedy that veers between deadpan dialogue and antic slapstick. "Chicken Run," Park's début feature, doesn't stray far from this formula. The story of a flock of talking British chickens desperate to escape the clutches of their villainous owner, the film is a technical marvel. The claymation giddily defies physics, and the elaborate stage sets (the chicken farm looks like a holdover from a Second World War P.O.W. film) are tremendous. Adult viewers may be less entranced by the plot, which relies upon stereotypes: the dumb-cluck hens, the plucky heroine who promises to liberate her friends, the doddering R.A.F. veteran, the cocky flying rooster (a Yank, of course) who seems like the chickens' ticket out. At times, the film takes wing, particularly in a magnificent action sequence inside a chicken-potpie machine. But the voice actors are hit or miss; though Parks gets good mileage from the accents of his Brits, who include Miranda Richardson and Julia Sawalha, Mel Gibson, as Rocky the Flying Rooster, has an unconvincing brio.—*Ben Greenman* (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

CROUPIER
A slight and streamlined bauble from British director Mike Hodges, about a writer (played to stony perfection by Clive Owen) who takes a job as a roulette dealer, aiming, in the process, to write a best-seller about his experiences. The plot revolves around the big chance he takes when he rescues a mysterious woman (Alex Kingston) from a life-threatening gambling debt. The lean and twisted screenplay—nobody is what he seems—gives Hodges ample time to play with doppelgängers, duplicity, and lots of mirrors. The sombre turns of the story and low-key performances are a welcome reminder that taut moviemaking (where violence erupts unchoreographed) can be as exciting as fast-paced editing and scorching pyrotechnics.—*B.D.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

THE DECALOGUE
In 1988 and 1989, the Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski made a series of ten films for Polish television, in which each movie, roughly an hour in length, was devoted to one of the Ten Commandments. The films, set largely around an apartment complex in Warsaw, are not so much literal illustrations of the commandments as fables inspired by them—very modern fables, it turns out, featuring relations between men and women, and parents and children, of a depth and intensity not seen since Ingmar Bergman stopped making movies earlier in the eighties. The films will be shown two at a time, in a series lasting five weeks, at Lincoln Plaza Cinemas in New York. National distribution will follow if the response is great enough to warrant it.—*David Denby* (6/12/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

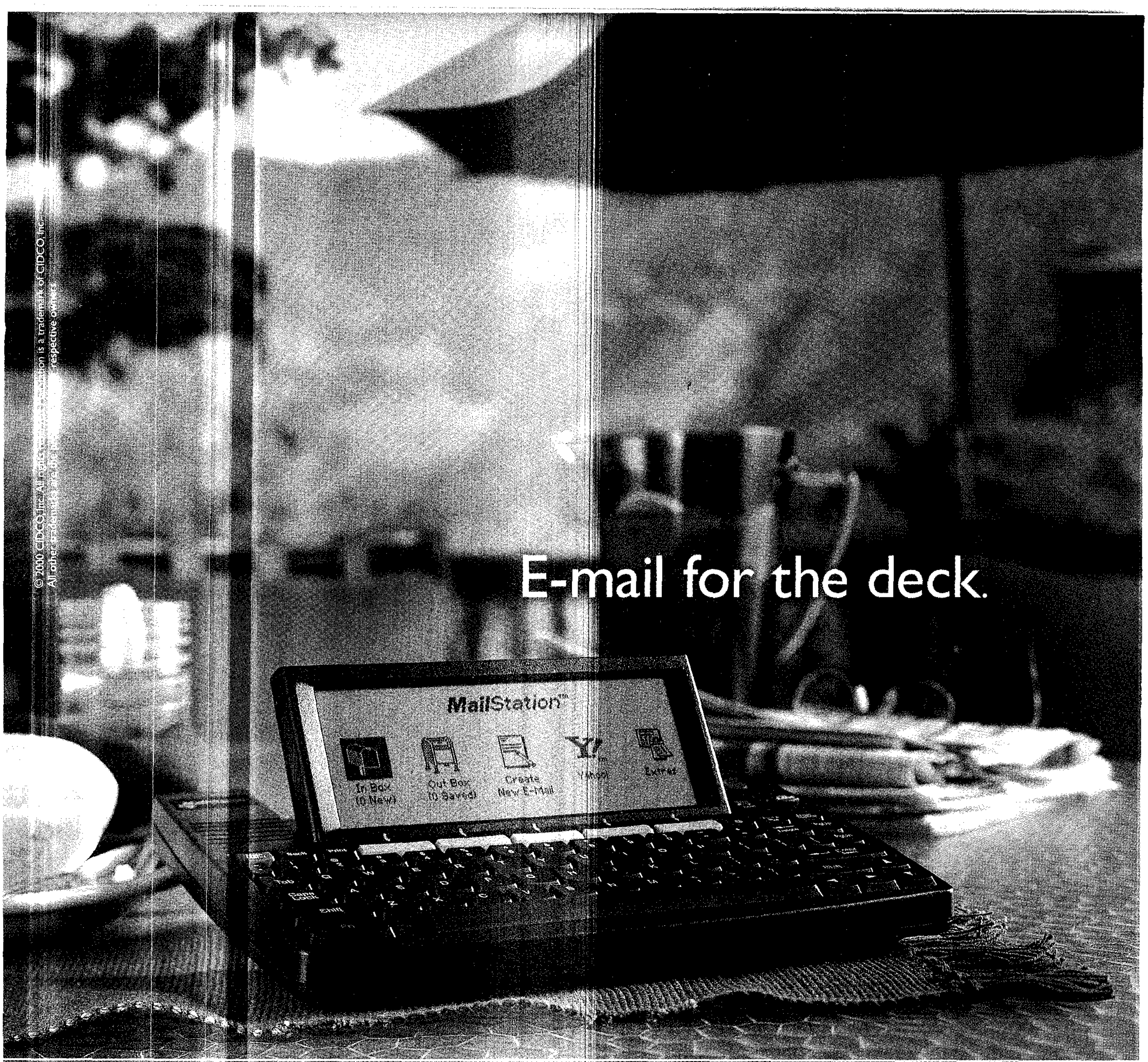
THE FILTH AND THE FURY
A new documentary about the Sex Pistols by Julien Temple, who has already made "The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle." Whether or not the band is an inexhaustible topic remains open to debate. The sight of a sullen and raw-skinned Sid Vicious sitting on a park bench and explaining how good-looking he is will not, perhaps, bear repeated viewings. The film wants Britain to be as reckless and unpredictable as its subject, but this requires a little twisting of the evidence: Britain in the mid-nineteen-seventies was bored and bungling, and, despite what Temple's riotous montage of unrest might suggest, the place was never on the verge of revolution—nothing beyond the musical, at any rate. The climax of the picture is all anticlimax. Uprooted from home territory, the Sex Pistols withered in the alien soil of America. Their antics have aged badly; how odd, then, that their fistful of hits sound more essential and purgative than ever.—*Anthony Lane* (4/3/00) (Art Greenwich Twin and Empire 25.)

FOXY BROWN
The spectacular Pam Grier lights up this cheap, lurid number from 1974, one of the last big years of the blaxploitation era. She's a bad-ass sister to her double-crossing, coke-dealing brother (Antonio Fargas) and a sweetheart to her righteous lover (Terry Carter). When the white honchos in charge of a dope-and-prostitution ring knock off both men, Foxy and a neighborhood black-power committee join forces to take down the Man (Peter Brown)—and the real villain, the Woman (Katheryn Loder), who poses as the head of a modelling agency. Grier wears her voluptuousness with style, whether pretending to be a high-class call girl or brawling at a lesbian bar. And, though the film includes rape, torture, immolation, and castration, she brings conviction to an idealistic speech in which she inveighs against big shots who flout the law and then tells the moral black vigilantes, "You take care of the justice, I'll take care of the revenge myself." Jack Hill wrote and directed.—*Michael Sragow* (The Screening Room; June 30 and July 1.)

GLADIATOR
It's been many years since movie screens clanged with Roman history; directors are rightly cautious about trying to reconcile the drama of martial valor with the sight of men in short metal skirts. In the hands of Ridley Scott, however, the Empire strikes back; his new picture is strong and stirring, almost to a fault. Russell Crowe plays Maximus, a Roman general so victorious in battle and so popular with his troops that the incoming emperor, Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix), decides within minutes to have him killed. Maximus escapes but winds up in slavery, under the rheumy eye of Proximo (Oliver Reed). His prowess established in the arena, our hero returns to the Coliseum to perform his final act of revenge. The simplicity of the plot feels right; whenever the movie strays into complexity—as in the dealings between Commodus and his sister (Connie Nielsen)—it founders and slows. What you want is the games, and Scott delivers them avidly, complete with unfed tigers. The emotional and political aftertaste of the film is another matter; the way in which it encourages a lust for blood and a rage for the restoration of order will not bear much examination.—*A.L.* (5/8/00) (Art Greenwich Twin, Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

GROOVE
A cheerful high arrives early in Greg Harrison's ode to rave culture: a girl in a laundromat, listening to techno on her Discman, grooves to the sight of tumbling clothes in a dryer. The scene lasts only a few seconds, but it sets a playful vibe for Harrison's amiable clubland picture. The cast is fresh and appealingly amateurish; they deliver pleasant performances in what are, admittedly, clichéd situations (a boy falls in love with a girl on the dance floor, another kisses a boy for the first time). What makes the film so much fun is Harrison's low-key directorial style—there's no flashy MTV editing timed to the music, just some shaggy, psychedelic club lighting and perfect rave details (the bottled water, backpacks, lollipops, and stuffed animals) that give the picture its love-in zest. The film features British d.j. John Digweed's ecstatic electronica, a blast of such sheer happiness that movie audiences should bring their own glow sticks to wave joyously in the air.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center.)

HAMLET
In this modern-dress version, the black towers of Times Square, fretted with neon, tessellated with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ledges, balconies, and catwalks, make a sinister and eloquent setting for the power struggles within the Denmark Corporation. The bedraggled Hamlet (Ethan Hawke), a slacker in a knit cap, recites "To be or not to be" in a video store and washes Polonius's blood-soaked clothes in a laundromat. Michael Almereyda, a young veteran of the New York independent scene, has developed his own form of visual poetry among the corporate settings and video screens, and many of the translations into contemporaneity are both witty and oddly right. Hawke is a depressed and adolescent Hamlet, but he doesn't cross the border into self-pity, and, in the end, the emotional power of the old play comes through.—*D.D.* (5/15/00) (Angelika Film Center, Cinema 3rd Avenue, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HUMANITÉ

An odd, slow, disturbing near-masterpiece set in Bailleul, in the north of France, where a sad-sack policeman named Pharaon (Emmanuel Schotté) investigates a sordid crime—the rape and murder of an eleven-year-old girl. The dim but empathic Pharaon lives with his mother and longs for Domino (Séverine Caneele), the big-boned factory worker and commonplace sex goddess who lives down the street. In form, the movie is a detective story, but we watch with increasing apprehensiveness as it dawns on us that Pharaon might be a kind of sluggish Oedipus, a sleuth who uncovers the traces of a crime that he has committed himself. The director, Bruno Dumont, works in Cinemascope, and the enormous, sharply focussed images breathe air and light and a richly suggestive stillness, a palpable sense of something powerful beneath the skin. The candor of the sexual imagery hints at a hidden connection between sex and violence, though we may find it hard in the end to say what that connection is—the movie's final shots are outrageously cryptic. Cinematography by Yves Cape.—*D.D.* (6/12/00) (Film Forum.)

JESUS' SON

The new Alison Maclean film, adapted from the short stories of Denis Johnson, is her first offering since "Crush," and it maintains her careful interest in careless lives. Billy Crudup, who gets more interesting with every movie, plays a chronic drifter. We meet him in Iowa in the nineteen-seventies (the golden age of drifting), and at other times and places of his own choosing. He falls in love, roughly speaking, with a junkie (Samantha Morton); some of their scenes together are hard to watch, but Maclean's direction is more tender than indulgent, and the movie grips hardest when times are most raw. As the mood lifts and lightens in the second half, with the hero redeeming himself by tending to equally troubled souls, the blaze of the film dies down. Still, not since Robert Altman turned his attention to Raymond Carver has a director seemed so determined to master the ramshackle.—*A.L.* (Union Square.)

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST

Kenneth Branagh, who appears to be working his way through the "Collected Works of Shakespeare," has landed on the most buoyant of the early comedies. This tale of two camps—scholarly guys and demure dolls—meeting in a sylvan setting has been shifted to the nineteen-thirties, where a young king (Alessandro Nivola) goes clubbing with his flannel-suited friends (one of them played by Branagh himself) in order to enjoy a little peace before the onset of war. The historical conceit feels glumly theatrical; the film somehow sinks under the weight of a single idea, and the flat dun lighting is no help. The text has been chopped back and interspersed with musical interludes, during which the actors sing and dance to standards of the period ("Let's Face the Music and Dance," "Fancy Free," and so on). Apart from invoking the charm of the amateurish, there is not much to be said about these moments; at any rate, the ghost of Fred Astaire need have no fear. With Alicia Silverstone, who bravely tackles the Shakespearean pentameter as if she were being asked to eat cactus. Pray you, do not laugh.—*A.L.* (Cinema II.)

ME, MYSELF & IRENE

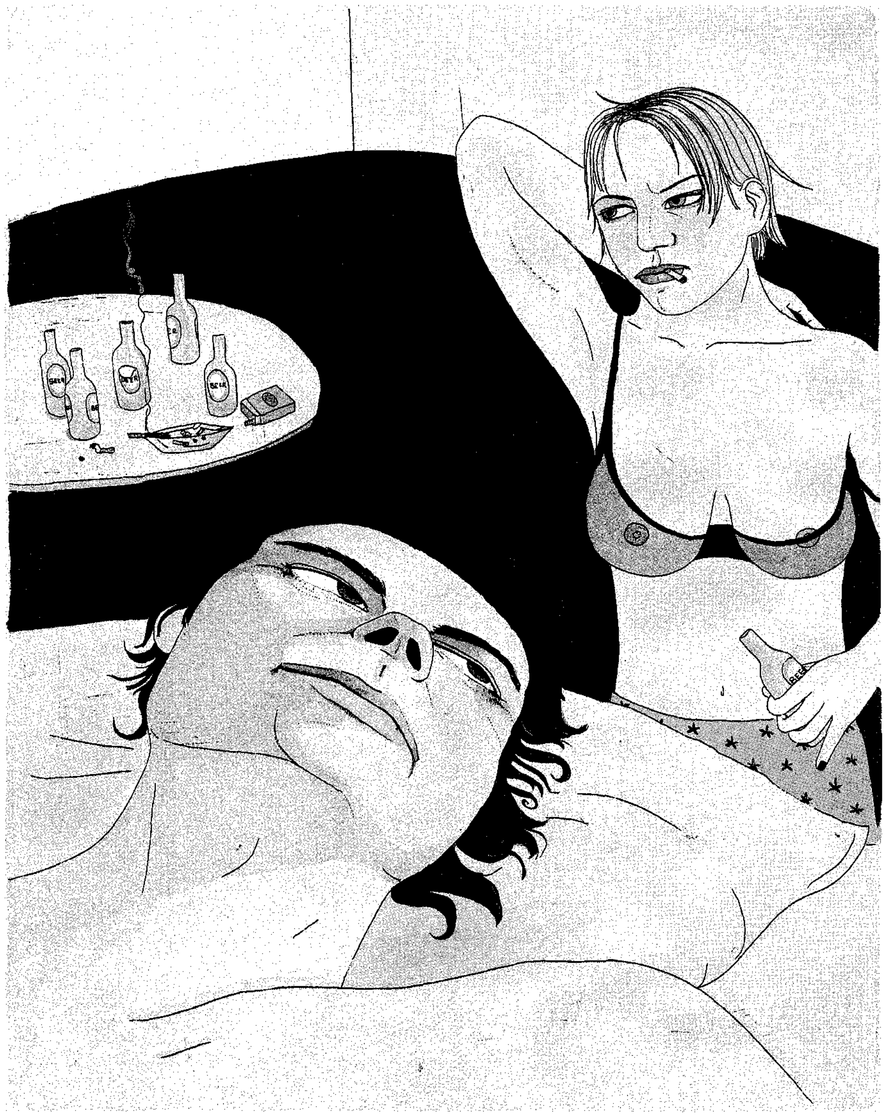
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea West, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Olympia I and II, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

M:I-2

It should have been a treat. The director is John Woo, the man who took the gravity out of gunfights. The screenwriter is Robert Towne, who wrote half the movies that made Jack Nicholson a star, and the leading lady is Thandie Newton, whose face could make a thousand ships do pretty much anything she wants. But this much vaunted sequel to "Mission: Impossible," which hops from Australia to Spain and back again, is neither happy nor hip. It goes through the motions of the multinational action thriller, and, although those motions are as flamboyantly excessive as you would expect, the result is more gruelling than pleasurable. If the new flick has a core, it is Tom Cruise, who reprises his role as the leader of a team of spies. The sense of teamwork, however, has dropped away, and the movie becomes an homage to the grim cockiness of Cruise, and, in particular, to his indestructible physique.—*A.L.* (6/5/00) (84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

NASHVILLE

The funniest epic vision of America ever to reach the screen. Robert Altman's movie is at once a "Grand Hotel"-style narrative, with twenty-four linked characters; a country-and-Western musical; a documentary essay on Nashville and American life; a meditation on the love affair between performers and audiences; and an Altman party. In the opening sequences, when the performers start arriving, and pile up in a traffic jam on the way from the airport to the city, the movie suggests the circus procession at the non-ending of "8 1/2." But Altman's clowns are far more autonomous; they move and intermingle freely, and the whole movie is their procession. The basic script is by Joan Tewkesbury, but the actors—including Ned Beatty, Lily Tomlin, Keith Carradine, Shelley Duvall, and Ronee Blakely—were encouraged to work up material for their roles, and not only do they do their own singing but most of them wrote their own songs—and wrote them in character. Released in 1975.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; July 3-5.)



Opening June 30, "Praise," a story of sex-obsessed slackers set in Brisbane, Australia.

LARA TOMLIN

SHAFT

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

SHANGHAI NOON

An extremely likable Western adventure that features the home-brewed stunts of Jackie Chan and the extemporaneous comic riffing of Owen Wilson (who borrows a lot from Dignan, the character he portrayed and co-wrote in the cult classic "Bottle Rocket"). Taking in a Jackie Chan movie is a lot like being ringside at a boxing match: the audience bobs, weaves, and shouts with every punch. As a Chinese imperial guard in search of a kidnapped princess, Chan fights his way through all the classic Western scenarios (the train robbery, the saloon, the showdown at the Spanish church), and Wilson fills the interludes with deadly earnest lectures on the fine points of the cowboy code.—*Michael Agger* (East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)

SMALL TIME CROOKS
A small-time comedy from Woody Allen, who seems to have shelved, if only temporarily, his studies of anguished human souls, preferring to draw our attention to the sight of human bodies getting into nasty scrapes and even nastier suits. In the new film, Allen himself plays a useless thief who, through no talent of his own, stumbles into money; the overriding purpose of this twist is that we get to see him wearing bilious green shirts, eye-scarring indigo jackets, and sub-Versace belts studded with gold rivets. This alone is worth the price of admission. Alongside Allen are Tracey Ullman, as his loud and triumphal wife, Hugh Grant, as the smoothie who is paid to educate her, Jon Lovitz, in a delightful but underused supporting role, and Elaine May, who slips the movie into her handbag and walks away with it.—*A.L.* (5/22/00) (Beekman, East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas.)

TIME CODE
Mike Figgis's new feature is a film that will launch a thousand theses. He splits the screen into four quadrants, and each section shows a continuous ninety-three-minute take, shot with four handheld digital cameras in synchronized real time. The audience must construct the narrative by "privileging" certain parts of the "text," but if you've ever stood in front of a bank of televisions you've probably already gone beyond montage. Figgis knows he's being pretentious, and he cleverly undercuts this with self-aware asides and frequent comic interludes. The cameras track separate characters who all end up at the same place: an independent film company called Red Mullet Productions. Some quadrants fare better than others: Jeanne Tripplehorn spends most of the film agonizing in her limo, and, thankfully, doesn't require much attention. Saffron Burrows visits her shrink, but she's hardly given any sound, and her story languishes. Stellan Skarsgård is superb as the alcoholic, visionary head of the film company, and it's his affair with Salma Hayek which creates the fireworks—as they couple, so do their screens. You may find that being a postmodern voyeur is hard work, but it's also a lot more fun than it sounds.—*M.A.* (Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.)

TIME REGAINED
Only a fool, you suppose, would attempt to film Proust; in that case, Raoul Ruiz, the Chilean director, is a wise and delicate fool, especially since he elected to concentrate on the concluding volume of "In Search of Lost Time." There's no Swann, and not much of Proust's beloved Albertine (Chiara Mastroianni), but plenty of Odette (Catherine Deneuve), the Baron de Charlus (John Malkovich), and the haughty Saint-Loup (Pascal Greggory), plus enough of Gilberte (Emmanuelle Béart) to demonstrate why men and boys alike would throw their hearts, or their teacups, at her feet. The picture has a stately, waltz-like rhythm, as the narrator (Marcello Mazzarella, a dead ringer for the real Proust) guides us through the declining fortunes of his friends under the shadow of the First World War. There are the inescapable glances back into Proust's childhood, but the movie feels more companionable than cloistered. At times, both people and props start to shift and sway, as though on the deck of a ship; if you come out of the movie suffering from a mixture of nausea and nostalgia, then Ruiz can pride himself on a job well done. In French.—*A.L.* (6/19 & 6/26/00) (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

TITAN A.E.
A fabulous piece of eye candy from the venerated animator Don Bluth ("An American Tail," "Anastasia"), which opens with a riveting set piece—a geologically precise destruction of Earth by an alien horde. Too bad all the innovative visual pyrotechnics are wasted on a script that cobbles together every sci-fi cliché in the known universe.—*M.A.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

ALSO PLAYING

BOYS AND GIRLS
Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.

BUTTERFLY
Angelika Film Center and Paris.

DINOSAUR (5/29/00)
East 86th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Sutton 1 and 2, and Union Square.

EAST-WEST
First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.

GONE IN 60 SECONDS
East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village Theatre VII.

ROAD TRIP
Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.

SUNSHINE
BAM Rose Cinemas, 72nd Street East, and Union Square.

THE VIRGIN SUICIDES
Empire 25, 59th Street East Cinema, and Village East Cinemas.

THE WOMAN CHASER
The Screening Room.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Sept. 3: "Behind the Mirror," a series of films that portray the darker side of the fifties. July 1 at 2: "In a Lonely Place" (1950, Nicholas Ray). ♦ July 1 at 4: "Bigger Than Life" (1956, Ray). ♦ July 2 at 2: "Kiss Me Deadly" (1955, Robert Aldrich). ♦ July 2 at 4: "The Big Knife" (1955, Aldrich). ♦ Classic movies. July 1-2 at 6:30: "Red Desert" (1964, Michelangelo Antonioni).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—June 28 at 8: "Madam Satan" (1930, Cecil B. Demille). ♦ Films by Indian director Satyajit Ray. June 29 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Devi" (1962; in Bengali). ♦ June 30 at 7:30: The restored director's cut of the Coen brothers' "Blood Simple" (1985). ♦ The best films of the nineties, as selected by *Village Voice* critics. July 1 at 2, 5:10, and 9: "The Thin Red Line" (1998, Terrence Malick). ♦ July 2 at 2, 5, and 8: "Goodfellas" (1990, Martin Scorsese). ♦ Robert Altman films from the seventies. July 3-5 at 2:30, 5:45, and 9: "Nashville" (†).

BRYANT PARK
Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. (521-5700)—Mondays, starting at dusk: free drive-in-style moviegoing. July 3: "His Girl Friday" (1940, Howard Hawks).

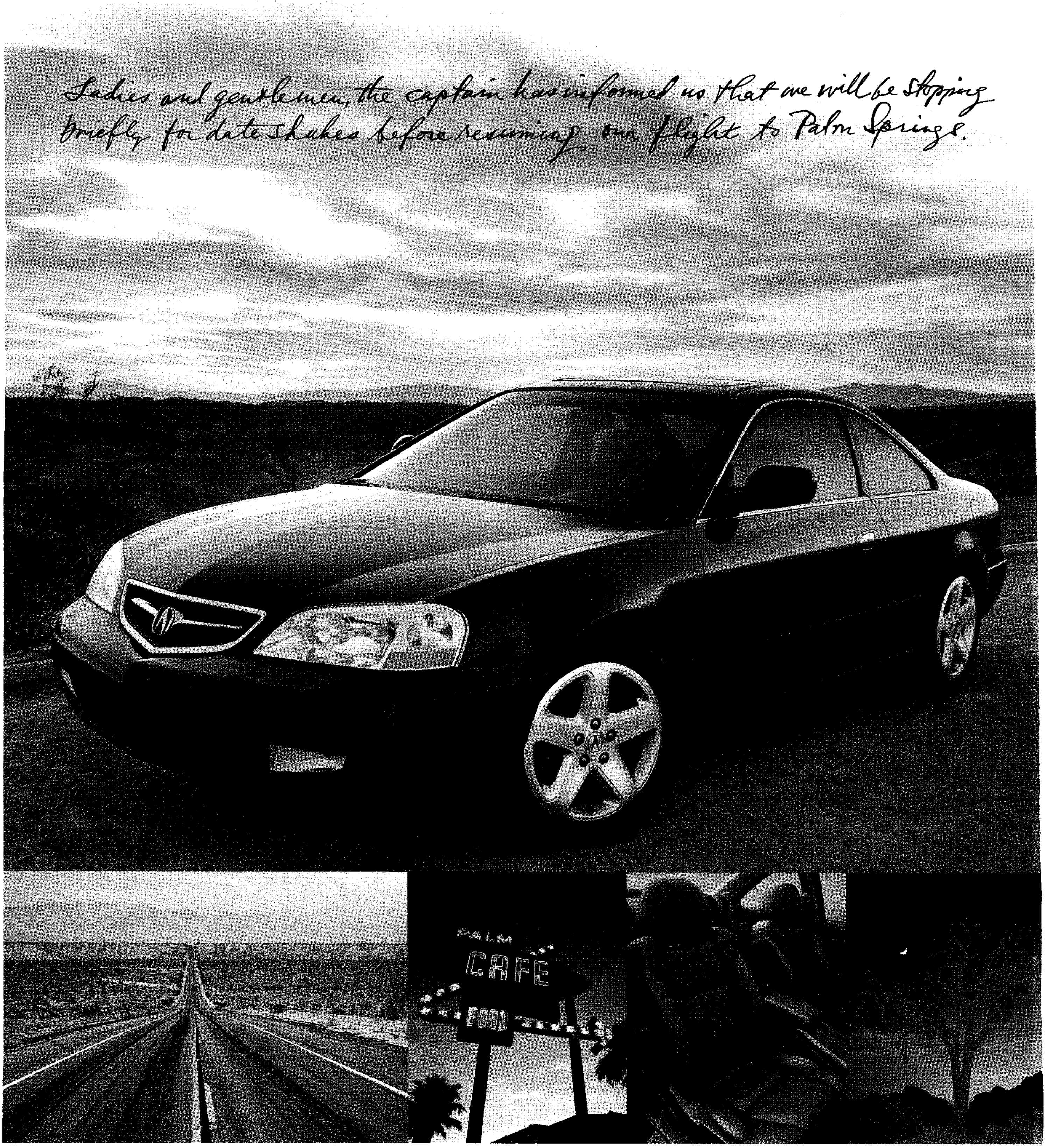
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—June 28-July 6 at 1, 3:20, 5:40, 8, and 10:20: A new print of Orson Welles's adaptation of Kafka's "The Trial" (1962).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through July 4: Screenings of ten restored Italian classics. All films are in Italian. June 29 at 6: "The Return of Don Camillo" (1953, Julien Duvivier). ♦ June 30 at 6: "Umberto D." (1952, Vittorio De Sica). ♦ June 30 at 8 and July 2 at 2: "Mamma Roma" (1962, Pier Paolo Pasolini). ♦ July 1 at 2 and July 3 at 6: "Red Desert" (1964, Michelangelo Antonioni). ♦ July 1 at 5 and July 3 at 2:30: "Un Maladetto Imbroglio" (1959, Pietro Germi). ♦ July 4 at 2: "8½" (1963, Federico Fellini). ♦ July 4 at 5: "The White Sheik" (1952, Fellini).

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION AND RADIO
25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—From June 30 to September 17: "The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends," a retrospective of work by the animator Jay Ward. Tuesdays through Sundays at 12:15, Thursdays at 6, and Fridays at 7.

THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Blaxploitation films. June 30 and July 1 at midnight: "Foxy Brown" (†).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through July 20: "Time and Again," a retrospective of films by French director Alain Resnais. All films are in French. June 30 at 1 and 6:30, July 1 at 3:50 and 9:15, and July 3 at 3:45 and 9:15: "Smoking" (1993). ♦ June 30 at 3:40 and 9:10, July 1 at 6:30, and July 4 at 3:15 and 8:30: "No Smoking" (1993). ♦ July 2 at 3:50 and 8:30: "I Love You, I Love You" (1967). ♦ July 2 at 5:45: Seven short documentaries by Resnais.


Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has informed us that we will be stopping briefly for date shakes before resuming our flight to Palm Springs.
PALM
CAFE
FOOD

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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

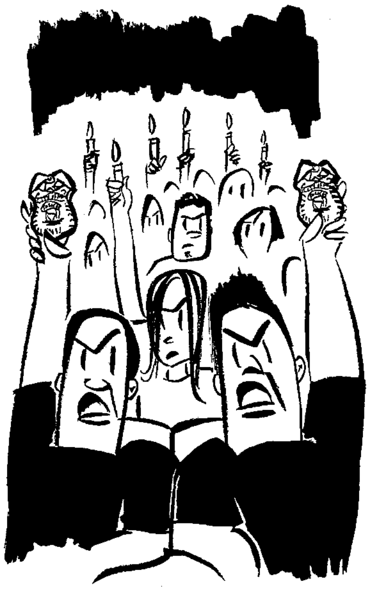
COMMENT
COPS AND WALLETS

Not every cop has heeded the call of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association to boycott Bruce Springsteen. At last Tuesday night's concert at Madison Square Garden, a trio of police officers happened to be seated up in Section 110, to the left of the stage. Their identity wasn't apparent to the naked eye; in a Springsteen crowd, lots of people look like off-duty cops. But when the singer launched into the dirge that opens his newest unreleased song—"*41 shots . . . 41 shots . . . 41 shots . . .*"—the young men reached for the heavy leather wallets that hold their badges, flipped them open, and held them up like candles. Then they booed—a dicey move, because "*Boooo!*" sounds like "*Bruuuce!*," the affectionate lowing with which Springsteen's fans serenade him. But there was no mistaking the officers' meaning.

These are dispiriting times for New York's cops. Their prestige, which had risen in synch with an extraordinary drop in the crime rate, has been dented by a handful of incidents that drew attention to the dark side of their aggressive methods. The most serious of the incidents—the one that prompted Springsteen's song—was the case of Amadou Diallo, a Guinean immigrant who last year was shot dead on his doorstep; the gun that four plainclothesmen thought he was going for was only a wallet. Then, last week, after dozens of women were terrorized by mobs of men in Central Park after a Puerto Rican Day parade, the police were faulted for not being forceful enough.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The booing cops in the Garden echoed the sentiments of their spokesmen, whose attacks on Springsteen have ranged from the truculent (Springsteen is "trying to fatten his wallet by reopening the wounds of this tragic case," the president of the P.B.A. said) to the ugly (Springsteen is a "dirtbag," the local head of the Fraternal Order of Police said). Still, the fact that the cops were in the Garden at all—and scores more must have been there, too—suggests that something is wrong with the picture of Springsteen as just another rich, liberal star urging the offing of the pig. Here are the lyrics in dispute, as reproduced by fans across the Internet—first the three verses, then the refrain that follows each:



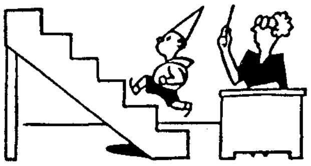
> 41 shots and we'll take that ride / Across this bloody river to the other side / 41 shots they cut through the night. / You're kneeling over his body in the vestibule / Praying for his life.
>
> Elena gets her son ready for school / She says now on these streets Charles / You got to understand the rules / Promise me if an officer stops you / You'll always be polite / Never run away and promise momma you'll keep your hands in sight.
>
> 41 shots and we'll take that ride / Across this bloody river to the other side / 41 shots my boots caked in mud / We're baptized in these waters and in each other's blood.
>
> Is it a gun? / Is it a knife? / Is it a wallet? / This is your life / It ain't no secret / It ain't no secret / Ain't no secret my friend / You can get killed just for living in your American skin.

This is the song that has lately been denounced for "depicting Amadou Diallo as a victim of racist cops gone trigger-happy" (Stanley Crouch, in the *News*), for creating "the impression that New York's police officers are a bunch of trigger-happy cowboys" (John Tierney, in the *Times*), and for condemning the cops as "cold-blooded killers" and "murderers" (Eric Fettmann, in the *Post*). What's striking about the song (especially in contrast to the obtuseness of the attacks on it) is its imaginative sympathy. The first verse takes the point of view of one of the officers, whose action is not exactly that of a murderer. (Something like what Springsteen describes actually happened in the Diallo case.) The second verse is in a mother's worried voice. (Springsteen's later songs are full of parents trying warily to prepare their children for the realities of life.) The third verse brings the two voices together in suffering, with a subtle hint of redemptive hope. The refrain combines the voices, too, without quite blending them, in a way that makes clear that the American dilemma enmeshes us all. Unless any song suggested by the Diallo tragedy is deemed ipso facto anti-police—unless actual content does not matter—then this song is not anti-police. To see it that way is like seeing "Born in the U.S.A."—until now, Springsteen's most misunderstood composition—as anti-veteran: after all, it fails to mention the many Vietnam vets who have gone on to positions of civic leadership.

Springsteen is said to dislike being called the Boss, but he is acutely aware of the responsibility entailed by the moral authority he has happened to earn. No other American artist has forged such a tender, reciprocally respectful relationship with such an enormous audience. (Springsteen's body of work may be the largest irony-free zone in American popular culture.) Springsteen was never likely, as Tierney claimed, "to play to the mob." His audience is not a mob. It is a public. As Tuesday's concert continued, the off-duty cops in Section 110 forgot their booing and gave way to the thick swell of emotion that slowly gathers whenever Springsteen performs. The cops pumped their fists joyfully, wiped away tears, and sang along with song after song. They knew all the words. When the new song is recorded and released, perhaps they will learn its words, too.

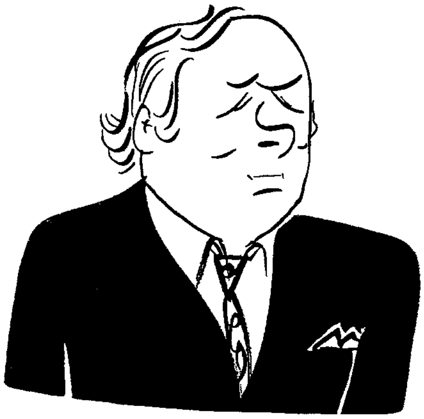
—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF KENNEDYS
MICHAEL SKAKEL'S CLASS REUNION



The Elan School, in Poland Spring, Maine—think "Lord of the Flies" for the Top-Sider set—served as an unlikely focus of last week's court hearing in the quarter-century-old murder of Martha Moxley. A family-court judge in Stamford, Connecticut, was weighing whether the evidence in the case was sufficient for the defendant, thirty-nine-year-old Michael Skakel, who is a nephew of the late Robert F. Kennedy, to face a murder trial. Two of Skakel's fellow-students at Elan in the late nineteen-seventies testified that they had heard the defendant confess to the murder, but the question that was buzzing through the corridors of the dreary courthouse had little to do with that revelation. It was, rather: What the hell kind of school *is* that?

John Higgins, the first of the Elan alumni to take the stand, had a simple answer. "It's a place to hide your kids if they bothered you," he testified glumly in response to a prosecutor's question. Elan advertises itself as a "school for adolescents with emotional, behavioral, or adjustment problems"—a destination of last resort for troubled teen-agers from wealthy families. (Fees currently run just under fifty thousand dollars a year.) Although school officials have said that Elan has moderated its approach in recent years, the most distinctive feature of the school, at least in Skakel's day, was its commitment to student-enforced discipline.



Michael Skakel

Elan's unusual practices led to the development of a singular local idiom that required frequent translations for the court. For example, Higgins and Skakel met as "night owls" (guards who kept watch on other students), and they participated in "haircuts" (sessions where students were screamed at by their peers), "general sessions" (haircuts in which the whole school participated), and "the ring" (one-sided boxing matches used as punishment). It was during a night-owl patrol, Higgins testified, that Skakel announced that he had murdered Moxley. ("Elan is anything but a brutal place," Martin Kruglik, the senior director of the school, said last week. "We have successfully worked with thousands of kids over the last thirty years.")

Gregory Coleman had a sunnier deportment than Higgins on the stand, but he probably won't be featured in a distinguished-alumni speakers series, either. A hulking six-footer, Coleman was transported to the witness stand from his current home, at the maximum-security prison in Rochester, New York, where he is serving a one-year sentence for criminal trespass at the home he once shared with his wife. At Elan, Coleman was put to work guarding Skakel, who had earlier made a brief escape from the grounds. According to Coleman, the school authorities put Skakel's bed on a stage in the dining hall, presumably so that he could be watched more closely, but he was allowed to listen to music. This prompted Coleman to tell his young charge, "You get away with murder around here." According to Coleman, Skakel responded, "I am going to get away with murder. I'm a Kennedy." After Coleman completed his overnight guard duty, he said he started cleaning toilets every morning at seven.

Mickey Sherman, Skakel's defense attorney, positioned himself in the courtroom so that the Elan witnesses would have to look right at the defendant when giving their answers. Sherman had a lot of raw material to use in his cross-examination of the two witnesses. It had taken more than twenty years for them to come forward with the purported confessions, and in 1997 Higgins had denied to a detective that Skakel ever admitted the crime. "I live and die by the truth," Higgins told the investigator. But the most surreal moment of the week came when Sherman asked Coleman about his role in the beating of a female student.

Coleman said that he and others used wooden paddles as well as their hands to administer punishment to the girl. "She went into shock, defecated on herself, and urinated on herself," Coleman said. (Elan's Kruglik denied Coleman's account.) What, Sherman asked, had she done to deserve this treatment? The witness couldn't recall. As Coleman explained, "I was involved in the rituals of the house."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

AT THE MUSEUMS
ALICE NEEL'S EYE

Here's an image by the portraitist Alice Neel, one of seventy-five works that can be seen in the first full-scale retrospective of her work, which opened recently at the Whitney Museum of American Art. "T.B. Harlem" shows a young Puerto Rican man lying on a bed that resembles a catafalque. His eyes are moist with suffering; his arms are thin and listless. A white bandage covers the left side of his chest; he touches the bandage with great propriety, as if it were a new wound. Everything about him—his soft mouth, his black, funereal hair—gives off a nearly religious aura; he's a secular saint, pleading softly for empathy and mercy, qualities he's found, clearly, in the artist standing on the other side of his illness.

Neel's paintings chart how a nice, middle-class white girl such as herself, reared in Colwyn, Pennsylvania, at the beginning of the last century, came to New York and almost immediately identified with the city's poor, obscure, colored, and bohemian worlds. Between her arrival, in 1927, and her death, nearly sixty years later, Neel became New York's painter laureate, recording a now vanished way of life: in Spanish Harlem, in the fuck-it attitude the most compelling of her subjects shared, who ranged from the street prophet Joe Gould to the great transvestite performer Jackie Curtis. Neel embraced the marginal, and the word defined more than half her life as an artist.

"It took three decades for her to be recognized, largely because she made tough paintings about people, in the age of Abstract Expressionism," Ann Temkin, a curator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art who put the show together, says. "She had to be rather inventive to support herself and her children, but she barely survived, and all the while she was making work that showed how real someone's presence was. But people weren't interested—she's still not widely collected, mainly because they don't want to live with something so alive and breathing over the mantel."

Sitting for Neel was as intense an experience as looking at one of her paintings often is. Julia Gruen, the executive director of the Keith Haring Foundation, posed for Neel in 1970 as an adolescent, along with her parents, the artists John Gruen and Jane Wilson. Gruen remembers the sittings as being "interminable." She says, "Alice looked very benign, like a nice old lady, but underneath she seemed to be made of steel. In the end, I found the portrait to be a little scary, far too revealing. But that's the price you paid for sitting for Alice—to be revealed."

Temkin says that Neel had an outsized personality and that she loved to gossip. "It's hard to figure out how she kept her humor," she added. "I mean, no one cared what she was doing. But she was committed to being a serious painter. One of her boyfriends was so threatened by her commitment to her work that he slashed some of her paintings."

When Neel began to paint people who were becoming well known, if not downright iconographic—the poet and critic Frank O'Hara, the art historian Linda Nochlin, Andy Warhol—she began to become better known herself. Typically, the inner circles of the art world, which had excluded her for decades, rushed to claim her as one of their own. But it was too late: her individuality was implacable, intact. "Neel lived to see the art world's narrow definitions about what constitutes modernism change," Temkin says. "She didn't want to obscure who we are, or who she was, by abstracting it. She wanted to draw from life. Directly. She wanted to affect the way we see painting, see portraiture, by affecting the way we see ourselves."

—*Hilton Als*

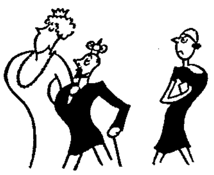
FULLER EXPLANATION DEPT.
SLASHING "BLOOD SIMPLE"

A distributor asked recently if my brother Joel and I would like to add anything to our first movie, "Blood Simple," for the release of a new "director's cut." We doubt whether anyone needs to see more of anything done by anybody in their twenties, and in fact the whole idea of a director's cut seems suspect. In 1924, Erich von Stroheim—legendary for insisting that extras in his costume dramas be issued period-correct silk undies—vainly sought to have his epic "Greed" released in an eight-hour version; from that attempt it was a short, ghastly step to the three-hour-and-fifty-three-minute director's cut of "Dances with Wolves." On video, the three "Godfather" movies have been expanded and intershuffled in so many ways that there are now as many "Godfather" compendia as there are greatest-hit CDs from the Who. Universal Pictures enticed paying customers back into theatres several years ago with a reissue of "Spartacus" in which a restored discussion of oysters and snails provided supposedly important context. Though it did add, inarguably, to the movie's length, the scene did not add to anyone's understanding of Tony Curtis, and even boasting more of Kirk Douglas crucified, this re-release, like all the other "important" reissues, smacked of hucksterism. The "new director's cut" is an act of commercial jujitsu whereby a studio flatters a star director into adding back scenes once shed to satisfy the market's mindless bias for brevity, and the studio proves, by selling the ungainly result, that it despises money.

With "Blood Simple," we managed to slip these complicated holds. Given the opportunity to rework our first movie, we more abjectly pandered to the market's mindless bias for brevity. We made the movie about five minutes shorter so that a pace that was once glacial is now merely slow, and did some editorial smoothing so that scenes that were once inept are now merely awkward. Though the trims have denied our aging movie the portly dignity of the usual director's cut, they go only so far: anyone who enjoyed the original can rest assured that, at the end, Frances McDormand still tacks Emmet Walsh's hand to the windowsill with a great big hunting knife, briefly indulges his bellowing, and then plugs him in the gut.

—*Ethan Coen*

ADULTHOOD AHOY! A FLOATING PROM



At seven on a recent Thursday evening, white stretch limos began arriving at a pier at Twenty-third Street and the F.D.R. Drive, where a rented yacht called Mystique was docked and waiting for the senior class of Landmark High School. It was prom night. The young men wore tuxedos in various pastel hues, and a few had on bowler hats. The young women, lithe as tulip stalks, were in long shiny dresses, backless and sideless save for a thin string running underneath their shoulder blades where a bra strap might be. The principal of the high school, Sylvia Rabiner, had come to see them off. "They're so cute, and so half naked," Rabiner said.

Landmark is a small, progressive public high school on West Fifty-eighth Street, with a graduating class of sixty, almost all of whom are going on to college. For the first time in the school's seven-year history, the seniors were to be allowed to choose a prom king and queen. The tradition defies Landmark's egalitarian philosophy, but a small group of girls had campaigned until the teachers relented—on one condition. The winners' names would be pulled from a hat. Even with this compromise, Vivian Orlen, the school's assistant principal, was nervous. "There's one particular girl, Elizabeth. If she doesn't get it, I swear she'll jump off the boat," she said.

Melissa, a round-faced, very pregnant senior in an ornate black-and-gray dress, sidled up to Orlen, who is very pregnant herself. Their bellies bumped as they kissed hello.

As Melissa walked away, Orlen shook her head. "It so depresses me," she said. "Because she's brilliant. Why do they need to make their lives more complicated?"

A gaggle of girls were lined up on the pier, their hair piled high. One girl had meticulously pressed into her hairdo hundreds of tiny rhinestones of the sort usually glued onto fingernails. When she moved, it was like watching a human disco ball.

Elizabeth—the girl who was desperate to be prom queen—stood in the center of the lineup. Her dress—black, strapless, with a sheer mesh midriff—was not her first choice. She had worked all year at Balducci's, saving her money for a five-hundred-dollar custom-made dress, but it hadn't turned out to her liking. In math class, the day before, Elizabeth had drawn a diagram of the failed dress on the blackboard.

LOS ALAMOS HARD DRIVES $5.95 each
SIPRESS

As the Mystique pulled away from the dock, "mocktail hour" began, and a d.j. spun a Jennifer Lopez tune under a tent on the upper deck. The girls kicked off their heels and put on terry-cloth bedroom slippers that they had brought so they could dance more comfortably.

"Oh, my God, I want to be prom queen so bad," Elizabeth said. Her face was sweet and stony at the same time. "I've worked so hard, spent so much money on my appearance—and now it's a raffle." Did she still care, then? "Oh," she said. "Even more. Because now if I win it means I'm lucky."

At eleven o'clock, after a buffet of pasta and salad, the seniors gathered on the upper deck for the coronation of the prom king and queen.

"And the king is—Greg!" a math teacher announced.

A cheer went up as an athletic young man in a pale-green satin dinner jacket loped to the front of the group and sheepishly accepted a plastic crown. Now the girls huddled together, hands on their hearts. Elizabeth stood at the back. Her eyes were fixed on the queen's tiara, which a physics teacher was holding aloft.

"And the queen is—Melissa!"

Elizabeth blinked hard. Melissa looked stunned as she made her way through the crowd. The tiara was placed on her head, and a satin sash was draped over her pregnant belly. In blue glitter, it read "Prom Queen 2000."

The king didn't want to keep his crown on, and he certainly didn't want to slow-dance with Melissa to "I Wanna Love You Forever." But he had no choice. The d.j. cajoled the couple onto the dance floor. Greg's girlfriend stood off to the side, looking peeved.

Elizabeth, in tears, had run down the steep stairs to the cabin below. Her classmates were philosophical about her defeat. "Nobody told her to act like that," one girl said. "A lot of people show their true colors on prom night."

Up on deck, the d.j. played the last song of the evening. He urged the students to link arms as Vitamin C sang "And as our lives change, come whatever, we will still be friends forever." The Landmark Class of 2000 hugged and laughed and cried. Elizabeth stayed below, hiding out in the ladies' room.

—*Dani Shapiro*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

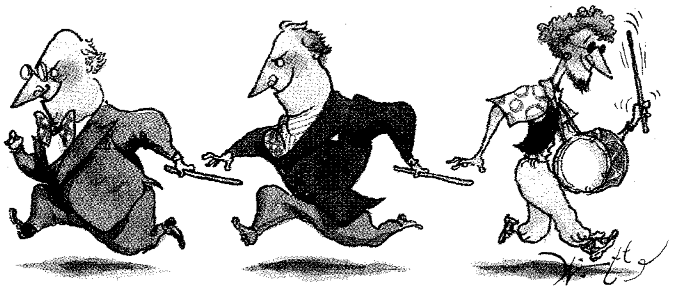
WHAT THE SEAGRAM DEAL MEANS FOR FAMILY FIRMS

For the past decade, Edgar Bronfman, Jr., has been the symbol for everything that is wrong with dynastic succession. Because of an accident of birth, a fifteen-billion-dollar company was entrusted to a man who had no college education or any real outside business experience—a man who (let's get right down to it) had written a song with the lines "I want to hold your body next to mine / I want to hurry love and take my time." Bedazzled by Hollywood, scruffily good-looking in an early-eighties Don Johnson way, he turned Seagram, his grandfather's old-line liquor business, into a flashy media corporation, and never quite shed the air of a make-believe mogul. So when the French conglomerate Vivendi acquired Seagram last week, a lot of people saw a cautionary tale about what happens when you let a scion into the executive suite. "One more nail in the coffin of family capitalism," a commentator said.

The history of American business is strewn with the wreckage of family firms, from RCA, where Robert Sarnoff turned his dad's electronics firm into a corporate crazy quilt, to Wang Laboratories, which Frederick Wang destroyed by following in An's footsteps all too closely. That's why our idea of a well-run corporation is essentially the one created by Alfred Sloan at General Motors: a business directed by managers whose professional success has nothing to do with their surnames and everything to do with the bottom line.

The customary rap against family businesses is that they milk their existing operations for cash instead of making the kind of long-term investments and daring expansions needed to sustain great businesses. Instead of building that modern new factory, the family firm prefers to live comfortably off the proceeds of the old one. In a magisterial 1990 survey of economic development in Europe and the United States, "Scale and Scope," the historian Alfred Chandler argued that only managers with no personal connection to their companies could make the hard but crucial decisions—like building the new factory. The fact that American firms tended to be run by professional managers helped account for their explosive growth in the first half of the twentieth century. British firms stagnated, by contrast, because they tended to remain what Chandler called "personal enterprises," run by their owners.

But how well does Chandler's thesis describe contemporary capitalism? These days, everyone wants managers to have a direct financial stake in the companies they run. And many of the fastest-growing companies—like Microsoft, Dell, Oracle, Nike, and Amazon—are run by the people who own them. The issue of succession is thornier. "The test of history has shown that it is very dangerous for a family to run a big firm," Chandler says. Yet there are plenty of examples of family firms that have prospered. The man who really transformed I.B.M. into Big Blue, in the fifties, was Thomas Watson, Jr.—the founder's kid. The Sulzbergers at the New York Times Company and the Grahams at the Washington Post Company have built their papers into powerful, lasting franchises. Mars, a family affair since 1911, sells fifteen per cent of all the candy in the world. Anheuser-Busch has prospered under August Busch III. The new chairman of Ford, who has helped reinvent the company, is one Bill Ford III. And Motorola is in the capable hands of Chris Galvin, like Bronfman a third-generation C.E.O. In fact, a study of more than two hundred public companies that were family-run found that they had higher profit margins and faster growth rates than their "professionally managed" peers.



This doesn't mean we should start grooming little Rory Gates for Bill's corner office. The pitfalls of dynastic rule are well documented. Those family firms which prosper combine careful succession planning—the Bronfmans, for instance, never let more than two members of any generation into the business—with a willingness to learn from outsiders. Henry Ford II is an example: he saved the Ford Motor Company from disaster by bringing in the so-called Whiz Kids, a team of financial and mathematical mavens who turned the company around.

Another example might be, yes, Edgar Bronfman, Jr., who as the head of Seagram did exactly what you'd expect the third-generation heir to a family business *not* to do. Bronfman easily could have played caretaker. The liquor business, though "mature," is still quite robust, and the company owned a quarter of the chemical giant Du Pont. Instead of simply milking these assets, though, Bronfman transformed the company—selling off the Du Pont stake and buying M.C.A. with the proceeds. Sure, it looked like folly at the time, but since then the value of that Du Pont stake has risen just fifty per cent, while the value of M.C.A.'s assets has, by some accounts, tripled. Even within the company's liquor operations, Bronfman expanded geographically and added lucrative new product lines.

There's plenty to criticize about Bronfman's tenure. He was too cautious about potential acquisitions and too fixated on old media. (For the $5.7 billion he spent on M.C.A. in 1995, he could have picked up a little company called America Online.) But he never put his family's interests above those of Seagram's shareholders. When Vivendi offered them what amounted to a fifty-per-cent premium on Seagram stock, Bronfman gave up control and took one for the team. You might say that nothing became his career as a C.E.O. so much as leaving it.

—*James Surowiecki*

MICHAEL WITTE

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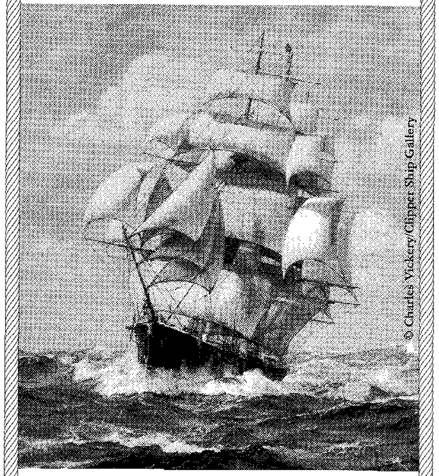

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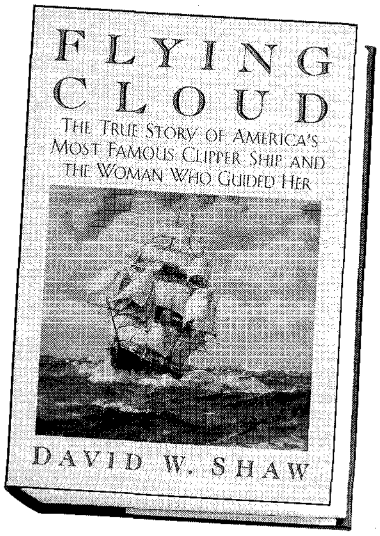
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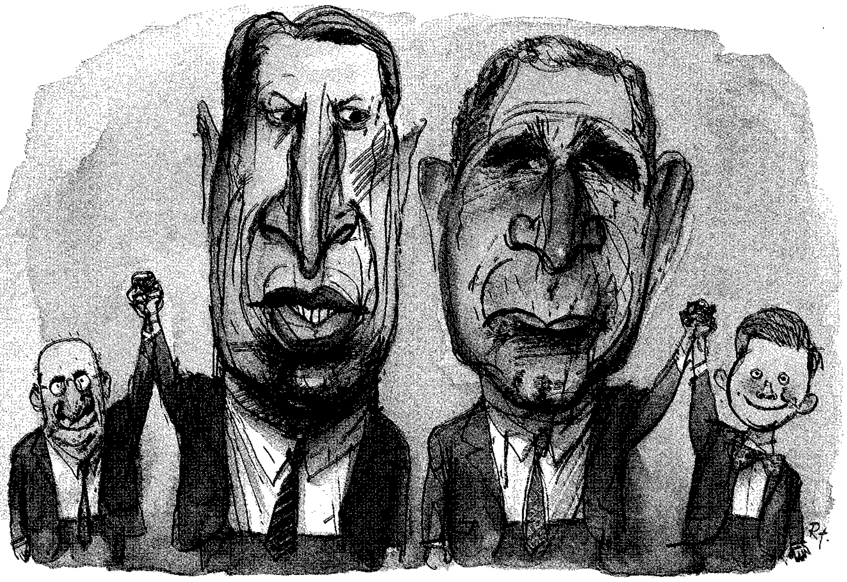
THE POLITICAL SCENE

VEEP SHOW

Naming a running mate could provide a bit of fun in this lacklustre race.

BY JOE KLEIN

Almost exactly eight years ago, during a late-night, mid-campaign flight from somewhere in America back to Little Rock, I asked Bill Clinton to name his favorite fellow-governor. The answer was perfectly Clintonian: long, comprehensive, brilliantly elusive—he pretty much named them all. The list even included Republicans; Tom Kean, the former governor of New Jersey, was at the top. Clinton seemed to know just what his peers had been doing and how well they'd been doing it. Gradually, he moved—as I'd hoped he would—into a rumination about whether any of them might make a good Vice-President. And then he drifted farther, to include members of Congress. He seemed to be thinking aloud. (There is no easier way to defang a journalist than to appear to be thinking in his presence.) I nudged him along. What about Richard Gephardt, of Missouri? (Gephardt was my hunch of the moment.) He was tough, disciplined, a pit bull who could be counted on to attack the opposition with vigor and conviction, a valuable quality in a running mate. Clinton seemed interested, but he was much more enthusiastic about a certain Southern senator: Bob Graham, of Florida. Graham, he said, had been a fabulous governor. He was smart, solid, and yet creative; a terrific fellow (and he might bring the state of Florida along with him in November). I was astonished: Clinton seemed to be making his Vice-Presidential selection as we spoke. After the plane landed, I raced to the nearest phone, called my editor, and announced, "It's Bob Graham!" (I was working for *Newsweek* at the time, and this information was quickly relayed to the Senator's delighted step-sister-in-law, Katharine Graham, our publisher.)



Maybe Al Gore and George W. Bush will surprise us and go against type.

RICHARD THOMPSON

Two days later, Clinton announced that Albert Gore, of Tennessee—whose name had never come up in our conversation—was the man.

In a Presidential-election year, no moment contains more peril and less payoff for journalists than this one. In early summer, the campaign usually drifts into a pre-convention lull, and the looming selection of running mates begins to seem a significant event to underemployed reporters—the Next Big Thing we learn about the candidates. The temptation to speculate, although almost always fruitless, is particularly compelling in a race as sluggish as this one: maybe Al Gore or George W. Bush will surprise us all and pick someone controversial, colorful, or . . . fun! What about Christie Whitman (as a Democrat, maybe!)? What about Tom Brokaw? Might John McCain or Colin Powell change his mind and team with Bush? Did someone mention Andrew Cuomo? Mario Cuomo? As the latter might say, Gimme a break.

Of course, the candidates and their staffs are quietly playing the same game. In recent election years, as the drama has evaporated from the political conventions, the Vice-Presidential lottery has become the only opportunity to create the appearance—if never quite the reality—of a fresh burst of momentum before the serious business of campaigning begins, in the fall. And so the selection of an unexpected, exciting (within reason) Vice-President has gained a certain currency. A favorite tactic is to show greatness of spirit by picking a mortal enemy, as John Kennedy did in 1960 when he selected Lyndon Johnson (who is always held out as a Vice-Presidential nominee who actually helped win an election, the rare exception that justifies all the antic speculative chin-pulling). Bob Dole created a similar, if fleeting, stir when he selected Jack Kemp, in 1996. Another favorite ploy is to find a fresh face or the "first" of some sort or other: Geraldine Ferraro (the first woman) and Dan Quayle (the first baby boomer) come to mind; Richard Nixon was a fresh face, too, believe it or not, in 1952—the first of the young Second World War veterans to be selected for national office. Perhaps the most original, unexpected ploy was Clinton's solipsistic choice of Gore in 1992: a fellow-Southerner, a fellow baby boomer, a fellow-moderate—this flew against the prevailing wisdom that a Vice-President should balance the ticket (by coming from another part of the country or wing of the party or from a different generation from the President).

Still, despite the best efforts of Presidential nominees to surprise and delight us, there is one aspect of Vice-Presidential selection which has tended to be fairly predictable over the past half century—and perhaps even revelatory of a congenital truth about Democrats and Republicans. The respective parties tend to trope toward distinctive Vice-Presidential types. Democrats, who take the business of governing very seriously (or so they say), tend to select solid, often senior, statesmen—people who could be plausible Presidents themselves. Kennedy chose Johnson. Johnson chose Hubert Humphrey. Humphrey chose Edmund Muskie. Jimmy Carter chose Walter Mondale. Michael Dukakis chose Lloyd Bentsen. Clinton chose Gore. One suspects that a deeper motive here is ballast: Democrats are more likely than Republicans to have wild primary battles and to select young governors—often flagrantly obscure young governors—to lead them.

Republicans, on the other hand, seem to see the Vice-Presidency as many corporations do: as a junior-executive position. They tend to pick youngsters, often stupefyingly undistinguished specimens. A gleeful blood lust seems part of the job description, but there's also the more subtle need to inject life into a ticket inevitably topped by some gerontocrat who is perceived to be Next in Line for the job. Richard Nixon—the perfect prototype—was only thirty-nine years old and wicked vicious when Dwight Eisenhower tapped him. Barry Goldwater made the fabulously inscrutable choice of Congressman William E. Miller, in 1964. Few had heard of Spiro Agnew when Nixon selected him, in 1968, although the then governor of Maryland, who was reputed to be a ticket-balancing Rockefeller Republican, turned out to be a slashing campaigner. George H. W. Bush was peppy beyond reason, and more than a little callow-seeming (but willing to "kick a little ass," as he announced after the 1984 Vice-Presidential debate), when Ronald Reagan selected him, in 1980; Jack Kemp was frighteningly effervescent as well. And then, of course, there was Dan Quayle. Q.E.D.

Actually, both of the current nominees would be wise to ignore the Vice-

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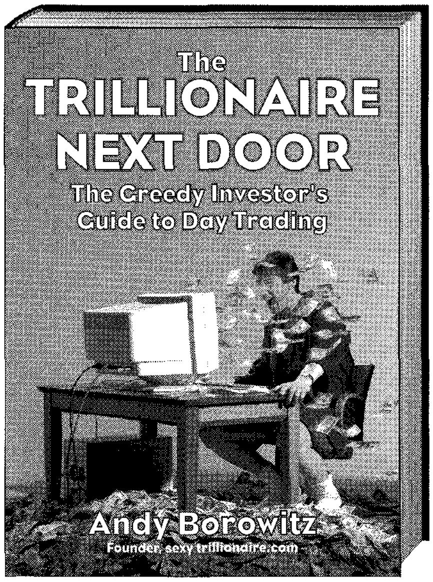

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Presidential genetic codes of their respective parties, since each has been an unusual choice himself: Gore is a rather Republican sort of nominee, elevated by primogeniture; and Bush, except for the familiarity of his last name, is the sort of inexperienced, little-known Southern governor whom the Democrats have often fallen for in the past. In any event, the last thing Al Gore needs is more ballast; the selection of a solid senior statesman (George Mitchell, of Maine, for example) would render the ticket so lugubrious that Democratic partisans—who have a weakness for the rowdy when it comes to politics—might well sleep through Election Day. Faced with a similar conundrum in 1984, the deeply sedimentary Walter Mondale—who is Gore's spiritual forefather—decided to create a little excitement by picking the New York congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro. The disastrous result of that selection only reinforced the wisdom of the Party's usual safe route: Ferraro's best-remembered moment was an endless press conference in which she was forced to deny the not very subtle insinuation that she and her husband were members of the Soprano family.

George W. Bush has an even greater need than Gore to swim against his party's natural flow. In a normal year, a fellow like Congressman John Kasich, of Ohio—who is young, way enthusiastic, and ambitious enough to attempt lung surgery on an opponent—would be the perfect Republican choice. But a Bush-Kasich ticket would seem a soap bubble. The Governor of Texas needs to bring a grownup aboard (although not anyone so formidable as to make Bush himself seem Vice-Presidential); it would be nice if that person also had a perfunctory and opaque position on abortion, and foreign-policy experience like, say, that of John McCain—who, truth to tell, would probably be an awful Vice-Presidential choice, unguided missile that he is.

In most years, the Vice-Presidential selection is pretty much forgotten by Election Day—unless he or she turns out to be a disaster. This year may prove an exception, though. The country is prosperous; the candidates are less than scintillating; the public will be tuned to other shows—the Olympics will dominate the last half of September, which is usually prime time for politicians in an election year. (It is possible that Bill Clinton will be hogging the evening news in September as well, by negotiating a Camp David-style peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.) Indeed, the Presidential campaign will engage the public's undivided attention for only a handful of dramatic moments, and each will carry disproportionate weight. The centerpiece will be the debates between Bush and Gore, and the candidates' acceptance speeches at the political conventions this summer will be watched dutifully by a significant fraction of the politically addicted. The naming of Vice-Presidents will be a big moment, too. In fact, it is a more accessible moment than most in politics—for many people, it will be a lot easier to name Al Gore's running mate than to describe his new Social Security augmentation plan. This may be the first moment that many casual voters pay attention in this not very crucial election year. It should be pointed out, too, that in the television era a Vice-Presidential nominee, once elected, has a one-in-three chance of later becoming President: not bad odds.

The stakes, therefore, are higher than usual. The candidates will be trying very hard to surprise and impress us; a blah Vice-President will not do. As in 1992, I have my hunches; unlike 1992, I have no faith in them. George Bush might do well to consider a dashing, combat-hardened Vietnam veteran who is not John McCain, like Senator Chuck Hagel, of Nebraska, or perhaps a politician who actually can rip Al Gore's lungs out, like Senator Bill Frist, of Tennessee, the surgeon who performed the first simultaneous heart-lung transplant operation in the South and has been a leader on health-care and foreign-policy issues in the Senate. For Gore, anyone named Kerry or Kerrey would be fun (although Bob Kerrey, of Nebraska, has the advantage of being Gore's mortal enemy, having already sided with Bush on Social Security reform). Then again, Gore—who changed his position in the Elián González affair for the love of Florida—might give serious thought to that state's distinguished senator, Bob Graham. ♦

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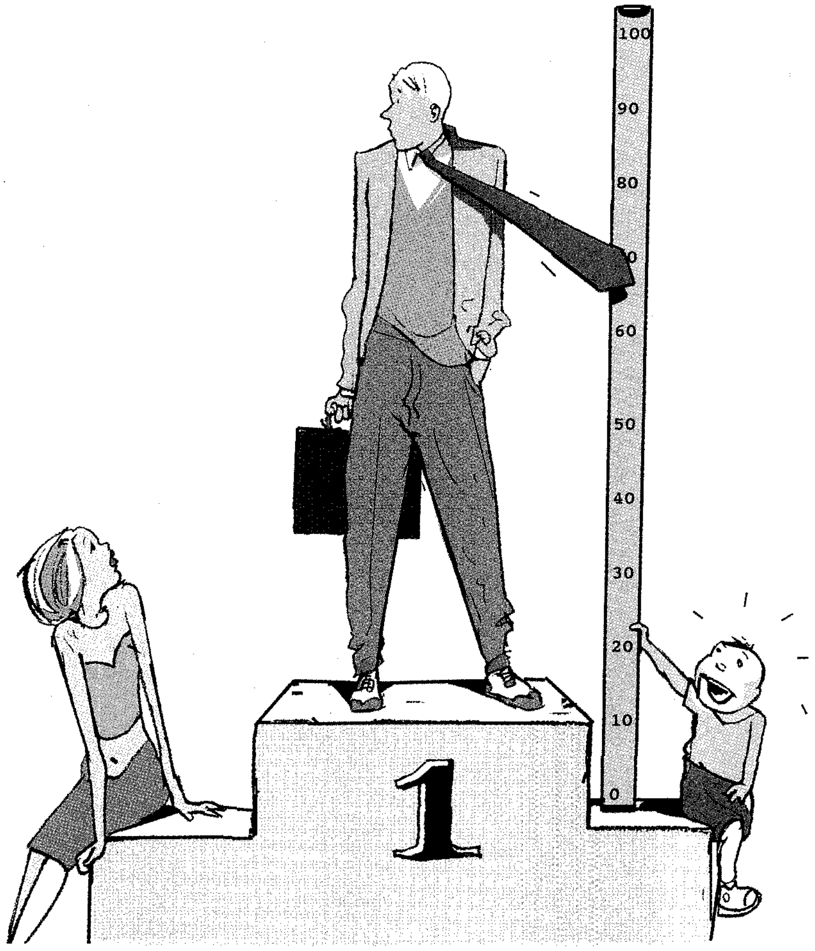
SHOUTS & MURMURS

HOW I'M DOING

BY DAVID OWEN



ISTVAN BANYAI

In the hope of establishing a more equitable framework by which the public can evaluate my effectiveness as a father, husband, friend, and worker, I am pleased to announce that the methodology heretofore used in measuring my performance is being revised. Beginning tomorrow, my reputation and compensation will no longer be based on yearlong, cumulative assessments of my attainments but will instead be derived from periodic samplings of defined duration, or "sweeps."

From now on, ratings of my success as a parent will be based solely on perceptions of my conduct during the two weeks beginning March 7th (a.k.a. "spring vacation"), the two weeks beginning August 1st (a.k.a. "summer vacation"), the seven days ending December 25th, and my birthday. No longer will my ranking be affected by unsolicited anecdotal reports from minors concerning my alleged "cheapness," "strictness," and "loser" qualities, or by the contents of viewing diaries maintained by my dependents. Page views, click-throughs, and People Meter data concerning me will also be disregarded, except during the aforementioned periods. The opinions of my children will no longer be counted in evaluations of my sense of humor.

Public appraisals of my behavior at parties will henceforth not be drawn from overnight ratings provided by my wife; instead, my annual ranking will be based on a random sampling of my level of intoxication during the week following January 2nd. My official weight for the year will be my median weight during the four weeks beginning July 1st. All measures of my geniality, thoughtfulness, romantic disposition, and willingness to compromise will henceforth be calculated just three times per year: on September 15th (my wife's birthday), August 26th (our anniversary), and February 14th. My high-school grades, S.A.T. scores, college grades, and income history will no longer be available for inclusion in any of my ratings, and in fact they will be expunged from my personal database. Evaluations of my success as a stock-market investor will no longer include the performance of my portfolio during the month of October.

Beginning in 2001, my annual compensation will cease to consist of my total income over the twelve months of the fiscal year; instead, my yearly pay will be adjusted to equal not less than thirteen times my nominal gross earnings during the four weeks beginning February 1st, when the holiday season is over, my children are back in school, and my local golf course has not yet reopened for the spring. My critics may object that my output during February is not representative of my output during the rest of the year, especially when I am at the beach. However, I believe (and my auditors concur) that the work I do during periods of cold, miserable weather provides the best available indication of my actual abilities as a worker and therefore constitutes the only fair and objective basis for calculating my true contribution to the economy. Conversely, my federal income-tax liability will henceforth be based on an annualized computation of my total earnings between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

These changes are being made as a part of my ongoing effort to insure that public data concerning me and my personality are the very best available. This new protocol may be further modified by me at any time without advance notice, and, in any case, is not legally binding. In addition, all assessments of my performance are subject to later revision, as improved information becomes available. Specifically, my lifetime ratings in all categories may be posthumously adjusted, within thirty days of my death, to reflect the content of newspaper obituaries regarding me, should any such be published, and the things that people say about me at my funeral. ♦

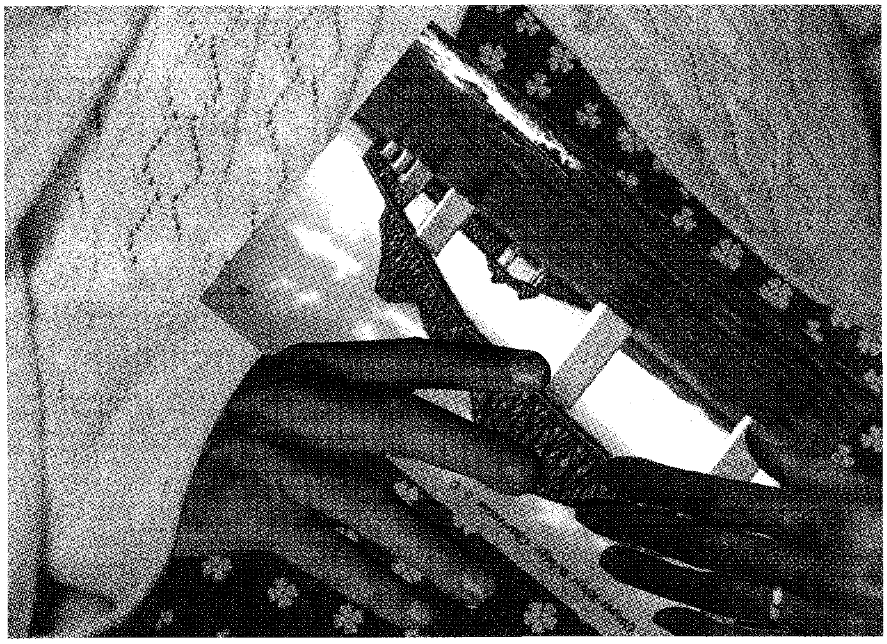
REFLECTIONS

GRANNY'S BRIDGE

The author's grandmother goes on the road.

BY TONY EARLEY

In 1953, when he was sixteen years old and the waitress at the diner on the road to Lake Lure had broken his heart, my father ran away from home. He left the red-dirt farms and red-mud roads of Polk County, North Carolina, and lit out for Florida with two friends. Florida, at that time, was inhabited mostly by girls—girls in bathing suits who drank fresh orange juice and danced for Jackie Gleason and water-skied twelve at a time behind the big boats at Cypress Gardens—and my dad had a plan: he and Buddy Number One and Buddy Number Two were going to leave their overall-wearing, fertilizer-toting, God-I-hate-listening-to-Ernest-Tubb-on-the-radio days unspooling behind them on the highway; when they crossed the Florida state line they were going to be Men, cool as cats in sunglasses and pegged pants and pink shirts, with ducktails out to here. They'd get jobs—as lifeguards, maybe—and to meet girls, well, all they'd have to do was open their doors and step into the sunshine.



Granny's unfocussed anger, worry, and grief over Dad's absence quickly darkened into a spitting cloud of hysteria capable of blowing in only one direction: Florida.

When my dad and his buddies turned up missing, an ex-girlfriend of his stepped forward and revealed where they had gone: she had overheard them talking about their plans in Buster Wilson's store. My grandmother Earley's unfocussed anger, worry, and grief over Dad's absence quickly darkened into a spitting cloud of hysteria capable of blowing in only one direction: Florida. She got on a bus pointed south, dragging the mother of Buddy Number One with her.

Granny was born Odessa Searcy, in the community of Rock Springs, in 1904. While you could see the world outside Appalachia from any high place in Polk County, finding a way down from that high place was beyond the reach of most people who lived there then. Rutherfordton, the nearest town big enough to be honestly called one, lay twenty miles away by dirt road, an all-day trip by wagon, and the town itself, though tethered to the world by a railroad track, was hardly a beacon of civilization. But, despite the poverty and isolation, Granny grew up keenly aware that *possibility* lay beyond the mountains. She possessed a sharp, occasionally cunning intelligence and an undirected, almost pathological ambition. That she spent all but a few days of her seventy-eight years within the same five square miles was the source of a lifelong, choleric frustration. "She had the fire in the gut," my father says, "but spent her life on a red-dirt hill, cussing the ground."

Granny's parents, Romeo and Sarah Searcy, were devout Baptists and semi-literate farmers, who never lived farther than a sick mule or a dry summer away from disaster. They pulled her out of the one-room school at Rock Springs after five years, and when she was thirteen or fourteen years old they sent her to Spartanburg, South Carolina, to work in a textile mill. But they soon found out that the mill sponsored square dances on Saturday nights and made her come home. Back in Polk County, Granny chose the best of the limited avenues she saw before her: a good-looking man. Charlie Earley was small but extraordinarily strong for his size, and was afraid of nothing in this world except buying on credit. One Sunday, when Granny was eighteen, she and Charlie sneaked away after church and got married. Later that afternoon, one of Granny's sisters caught my grandfather with his hand inside my grandmother's blouse and told on them. ("He was playing with my breasties" is the way Granny described it.) When Granny refused to renounce the man I came to know, almost fifty years later, as Paw-paw, my great-grandmother Searcy "took to the bed" and said she was going to die. Granny held her ground, though, and after several days my great-grandmother decided that she wasn't going to die after all, got out of bed, and lived another forty years.

During the time he courted my grandmother, Paw-paw had worked as a tenant farmer and hired out for wages at sawmills and the occasional liquor still. After they were married, he refused at first to buy a house of his own, because doing so would have required him to borrow money. Instead, he and Granny

STEPHEN KRONINGER

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moved from one tenant shack to another, until she stopped cooking and threatened to leave. Hungry, he borrowed money from an uncle and bought a small, nominally productive ridge-top farm, where he worked for the rest of his life, with little discernible effect.

By the time I was in high school, Granny's ambition had hardened and soured into a kind of sad conniving. She walked and talked and acted the way she imagined a rich woman—a lady of society—would. For years, she dyed her white hair black, then, near the end of her life, edged toward an odd, chemical auburn. She mixed and matched her clothing into color combinations that would have been startling on a tropical bird. Encountering her in public without warning could be like wandering into a costume drama. Even in the last moments of her life, she pretended to be someone else. Shortly before she died, a doctor tried to hand her purse to my mother. Granny, who still hadn't forgiven my mother for marrying her son, refused to let go of the strap. She looked Mom straight in the eye and said, "I've never seen that woman before in my life."

When my father ran away from home, my grandmother was forty-nine years old and still at the peak of her stamina and ability, but, knowing Granny, I imagine that she had already looked ahead and seen the point at which the road she was travelling would start inexorably downhill. Her two older sons had moved away, and even if my father made it back to Polk County safely, she must have realized, he was sixteen years old and would not stay at home much longer. Paw-paw was still contentedly scratching at his small patch of dirt and showed no signs of developing the desire or initiative to attempt anything grander. Granny must have felt the world constricting around her, growing even smaller than it had always been. Perhaps it was that despair that made her board the bus in Rutherfordton—a wild woman, a force of nature. Perhaps all she was chasing was the last two years during which one of her children would still be living in her house.

I wonder if she was thinking about any of this as the bus rolled into Spartanburg, past the mill where she had worked as a child, or if she was still overcome with grief at the thought that she might never see my father again. At what point did her hysteria subside into the drone of the bus engine and into the realization that she was surrounded by strangers, travelling who knows where? At what point did she finally look out the window and discover that she had passed into a new country, where nothing she laid eyes on could have been newer if God had minted it fresh just moments before? Most of all, I wonder what must have gone through her mind when she stepped off the bus in Jacksonville and realized for the first time that Florida was a *state*, that Jacksonville alone contained more people than she had seen in her life, that she had about as much chance of finding her son as she had of finding any of the nameless things that could have made her happy.

Somewhere in South Carolina that same afternoon, Dad and Buddy Number Two had begun to sing "Oh, Mine Papa," which made Buddy Number One so homesick that they had to let him out in Columbia and buy him a bus ticket home. The ticket took the better part of their combined cash. Dad and Buddy Number Two had just enough money left to make it to St. Petersburg, where they were arrested for vagrancy. Buddy Number Two's

MARSYAS

The stopwatch is made of molten gold,
and the bird's nest has both entrance and exit.
It is agape continually,

so those who'll fly in can also fly out.
The sheltering roof is not a prison,
nor the dungeon of the Phoenix a myth. . . .

But I saw the horror long before it saw me,
and sang my song before my nemesis struck.
So I went off before I was caught

and then I did everything twice or thrice,
to escape the last act, the dénouement. . . .
Still, there was no way not to be in the picture,

no way not to be a ghost or a martyr.
So what I had to meet I then did meet,
and what I had to face I did face, as well,

my own face, twilit and mute, there at the hospital,
deep in the graven mirror. . . . As slowly
we'll travel, past a bridge heaped with beasts,

as slowly we'll confront the fanged tide,
or the penetration of the bullet
yet again in the old dream. As slowly

we'll annotate, one by one, the scars,
the flayed body, the echoing scream, as slowly
we'll recall, as on a summer's day, now the rain falls,

the habit of love, all the telltale cost.

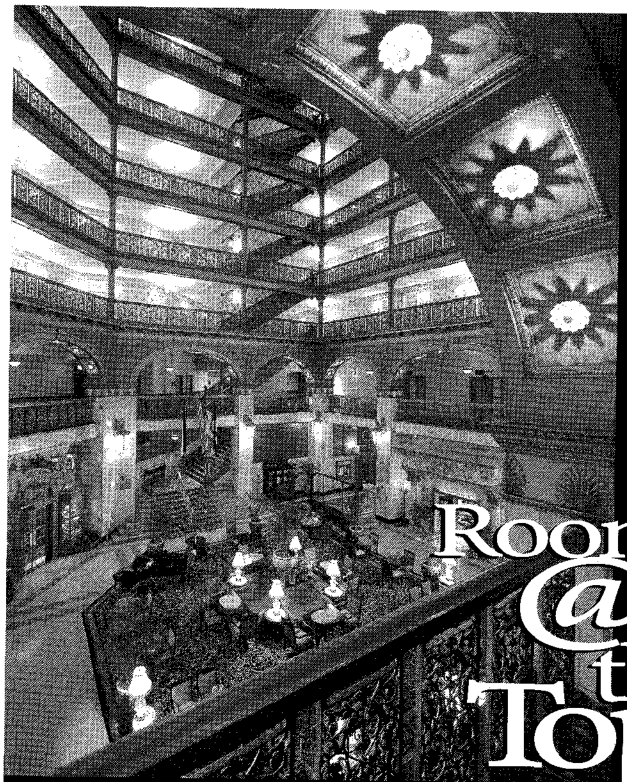
—*Robert Mazzocco*

father wired them bail and gas money.

They beat Granny home. The boys returned to school, both ashamed and heroic. Dad was reconciled with his ex-girlfriend, and, years later, when she was pregnant with me, she found herself in an obstetrician's waiting room with the former waitress at the diner on the road to Lake Lure. They spoke civilly but did not become friends. My grandmother, aside from an occasional day trip to visit relatives in upstate South Carolina, never again left the state of North Carolina.

The last time I saw her at home, I slipped easily into the role I had played with her many times before: I was the sensitive young man who wanted to be a writer; she was the older woman looking back over her life from the vantage point of accumulated experience. She told me how, years earlier, while travelling, she had happened upon the most magnificent bridge. It shot over the water so far that she could barely see the other side. It was so high in the air that she could hardly breathe as she crossed it. Off in the distance, she saw a huge ship steaming toward port, and the bridge was tall enough for the ship to pass under it. Beyond the ship lay the ocean it had crossed. She told me that crossing that bridge was the grandest thing that had ever happened to her.

Not until much later did I realize that the bridge she'd described was the Cooper River Bridge, in Charleston, South Carolina, and that she had been on her way to Florida when she saw it. She hadn't mentioned that she'd been travelling with the mother of Buddy Number One, or that she hadn't known where she was going at the time, or that people had laughed behind her back for years about that adventure. Instead, she had chosen—from what she must have considered an inadequate array of choices—to tell me that she had once seen a sight so extraordinary that she had become extraordinary by seeing it. In an alchemy of will, she had taken a bus, a bridge, and a failed journey and had transformed them into the culmination of a life. It wasn't lying, exactly, but, rather, burnishing memory until it looked like hope. It was her voice saying "Here I am! Here I am!" even as it grew fainter and finally crossed out of earshot. ♦



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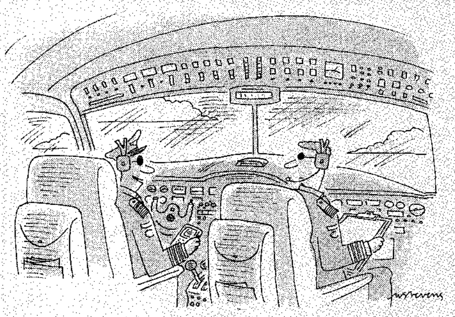

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

TWO MOTHERS

A six-year-old boy, the girl he killed, and the lives of the women who raised them.

BY PETER J. BOYER

On February 29th of this year, a six-year-old boy carried a .32-calibre pistol into his classroom at the Buell Elementary School, in Flint, Michigan, and shot and killed a first-grade classmate, Kayla Rolland, who was five. In the ensuing media coverage, the two children's mothers assumed the status of their children—the victim and the shooter. The little girl's mother, thirty-year-old Veronica McQueen, who is white, was flown to Washington for a private meeting with President Clinton in the Oval Office, and then again on Mother's Day, when she was a featured speaker at the Million Mom March anti-gun rally. At home, sponsors helped her surviving children—an eleven-year-old girl and a nine-year-old boy—transfer to a private school. The shooter's mother, a twenty-nine-year-old black woman named Tamarla Owens, was identified as the central figure in a hellish portrait of neglect and endangerment that was the boy's life. The facts, as they emerged, were damning. Tamarla's husband was in jail, and Tamarla herself had an arrest record. After being evicted from her home, Tamarla had distributed her children—an eight-year-old boy, the six-year-old, and a five-year-old girl—to relatives, depositing the boys with a twenty-two-year-old uncle whose house contained stolen guns, ammunition, and drugs, and was notable for gunplay, fistfights, and illicit foot traffic. According to neighbors, it was a neighborhood crack house.

In the media, Tamarla came to be seen as "the poisonous garnish to this life," as the Detroit *News* wrote. "Tamarla Owens did not protect her young children from this harsh reality, but instead delivered them straight to evil's door." In the days and weeks after the shooting, it was difficult for Tamarla to refute the assertion that she was, as she heard herself described, the worst mother in America.

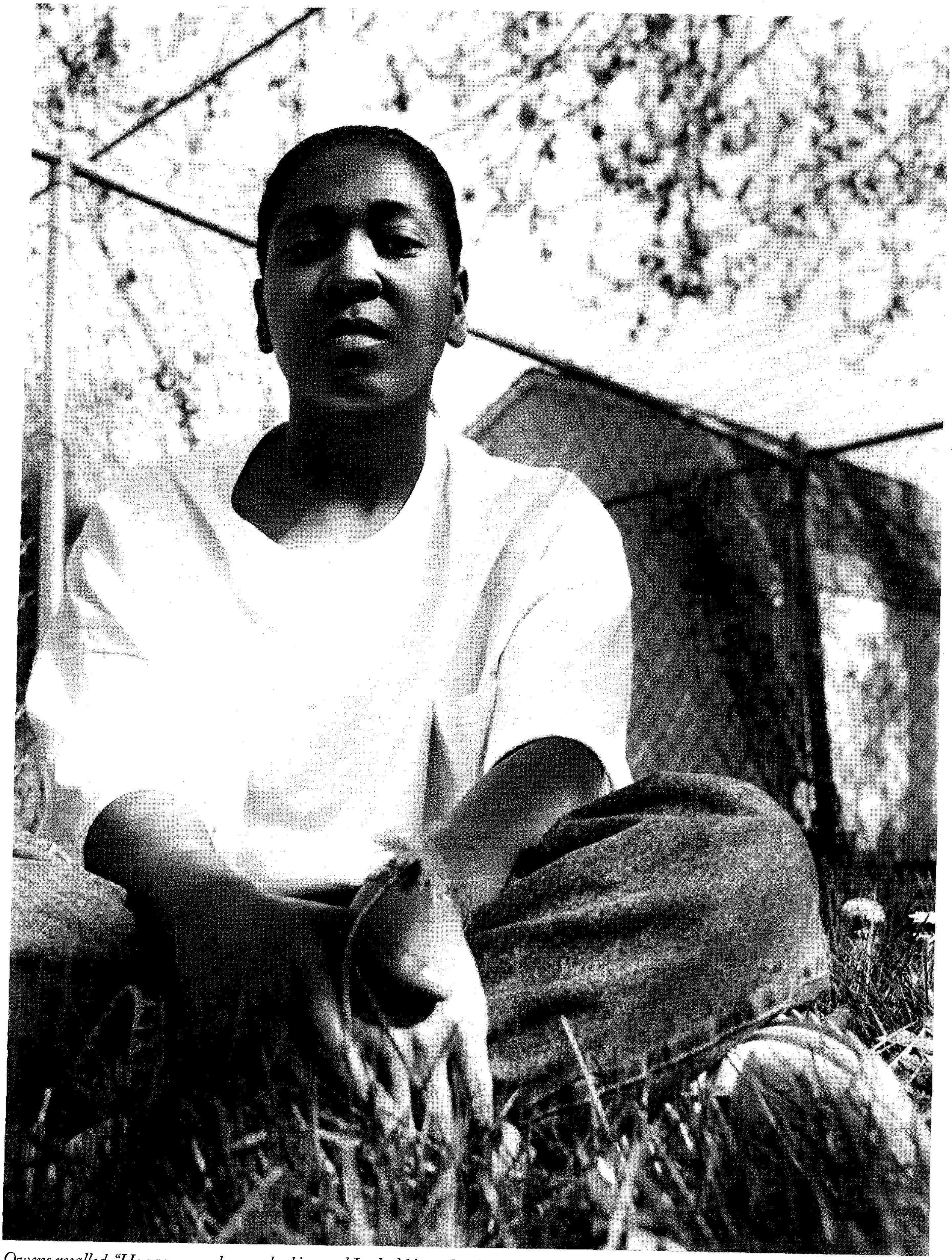
Nor did Tamarla help her cause with puzzling things she said about the shooting—comments suggesting that she believed responsibility for Kayla's death was somehow not hers, or her son's. "It was just something that happened," she said on a local TV newscast. "It could have been anybody's child who done this. It just so happened it was mine." Even Kayla's mother agreed that the boy was "as much a victim as my daughter was." Within the bounds of the community where Tamarla and Veronica lived with their children, a bleak place on the edge of Flint called Beecher, that view begins to make sense.

Flint, the working-class city where General Motors was created and, in a historic sitdown strike in 1936, the United Auto Workers was born, has been on a long losing streak since the nineteen-seventies, when the American automobile's hegemony ended. In the national segue from Old Economy to New Economy, Flint seems to have slipped into a warp zone of No Economy. The lean, efficient "just in time" suppliers of the new auto industry have avoided Flint; and the unemployment rate is two times the national average. Even so, Flint's city fathers are careful to distinguish their town from Beecher, insisting that technically Beecher belongs to neighboring Mt. Morris Township.

Beecher was developed in the nineteen-forties and fifties as a bedroom community for the Poles and other ethnic Europeans who came to Flint to work in the "shops," as G.M.'s huge factories were called. The streets were given names like Princeton, Harvard, Yale, and Cornell, reflecting the optimism of the workers who had the best security and the highest pay in the world, and believed their good fortune would

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BASTIENNE SCHMIDT

"He ran to me. He was, like, 'Mama!'" Tamarla



Owens recalled. "He gave me a hug and a kiss, and I asked him what happened. He was, like, 'I shot a little girl.'"

last through the generations, like the dominion of the Buicks and Chevys they built. One side of the community was bounded by the titanic Buick City plant—one of the largest auto factories in the world, with an assembly line nearly a mile and a quarter long. The plant closed down last summer. Beecher is now a five-square-mile patch of joblessness, its five thousand residents—a near-even mixture of blacks and whites—among the poorest in the country. Almost half the adults who live there lack high-school diplomas; forty-five per cent of the households have annual incomes of less than fifteen thousand dollars. Eighty-one per cent of the schoolchildren are on government-subsidized school-meal programs. Houses in Beecher can be bought for twenty thousand dollars or less—about what they cost when they were built—and can rent for three hundred dollars a month. But the only takers are the desperate, some looking for a first chance, others settling for a last resort. In daylight, Beecher, with its potholed streets and dirt roads and boarded-up windows, resembles a shantytown in poor-white Appalachia or the Black Belt South, but it has none of the poetry. At night, you hear the snarls of pit bulls, the crack of gunfire, and the commerce of flesh and drugs.

Beecher is the neighborhood that produced Tamarla's six-year-old killer, but it was also Veronica's home, where she was raising Kayla and her two other children. Tamarla and Veronica didn't know each other, and even now, when they're the two most famous mothers in Flint, they've never met; but each woman knows what the other's life has been like.

VERONICA'S STORY

As a child, Veronica McQueen had a hard time with schoolwork; she read only with the greatest difficulty, and sometimes it seemed to her impossible to sort out all the information she was receiving. She now supposes that she is dyslexic, but at the time she was deemed a failed student. "They thought I was unruly," she says. "And it's just that it was hard for me, seeing stuff backwards and reading stuff backwards." Her father, Joe, who worked in the Chevy truck plant, and her mother, Ingrid, did not have high expectations for her. When she quit school, in the ninth grade, they helped her find a position away from Beecher, in a small lakeside town upstate called Whittemore, caring for an elderly couple that Joe's family knew. Her ambitions were modest but eminently achievable: she wanted children.

"I always loved taking care of children," Veronica says. "There was one time I asked my sister-in-law to have a baby for me. I was young, too young to have one, and she laughed, thought it was quite funny. And she goes 'There's more than just having the baby—you have to *take care* of the baby.' " Veronica soon found that out for herself. In Whittemore, she met a man named George Allen, who was ten years her senior and had no job or any particular prospects. But he seemed nice enough, and she began seeing him, and eventually she got pregnant. In March, 1989, when she was nineteen, she gave birth to a girl, whom she named Elizabeth. "It was amazing," she remembers. "The first day, I called from my room, I said, 'Please, bring my daughter.' And those words were just so amazing to say: 'My daughter. My child.' "

Soon afterward, Veronica married George Allen, and a year later she had another baby, a boy named Jonathan. George got a job at a scrap yard, and the family moved into a two-bedroom cabin, but after a time Veronica wearied of life with her husband. ("I couldn't see me being unhappy just to make everybody else happy.") In 1993, she moved back to Flint with the kids, and into a used trailer—a gift from her father, who was one of the fortunate ones still employed in the shops. Veronica was glad to have a place of her own, but, with two antsy kids, life in the trailer could get close on a summer afternoon, and she considered herself lucky, because she had a place to escape to.

She called it "the farm," a grand name for the house she'd lived in as a girl. It was a simple structure with a bit of land in hardscrabble country outside Flint. One day in late August, she and her kids went out there to spend the day. Her father was a compulsive putterer, and his project that day was to repair the roof. He and his son, Phillip, went to work, joined by an old pal of Phillip's named Ricky Rolland. Veronica had known him only as a friend of her brother's, but she noticed him that day. He had a tattoo, and the air of someone who'd seen something of the world beyond Flint; he also possessed just enough charm so that by the end of the day he had got Veronica off into a hidden corner of the place.

"I was by myself. I was just twenty-three, and very lonely," Veronica recalls. "They were doing the roof, and Ricky was there helping, and uh, we just—we got together that day. We started talking and everything, and that was about it. It was a brief love affair." A few weeks later, she discovered that she was pregnant.

Veronica didn't know it, but Ricky was involved in relationships with other women. One of them, Tammy Lynn Fortin, had borne him a son, Nicholas, in 1987. For nearly three years, Ricky had avoided summonses for paternity actions she filed. In November, 1990, he was finally served with paternity papers. By then, he had no choice: he was in a state penitentiary, doing time on a larceny conviction.

Ricky Rolland's biography reads like a profile of working-class Flint in its tumbling decline. His father, Claudie, migrated to Flint from Arkansas in the fifties, got a job driving a forklift at the Fisher Body plant, and married a Flint girl, Rebecca, whose father, uncles, and brothers all worked in the shops. Rebecca and Claudie had four sons, and what Rebecca wanted for her boys was an education and a job, and for them to stay clear of trouble. "But everything went just the opposite, mostly," she says now. As Ricky, her oldest son, was reaching his teen-age years, the auto industry went into its slump. "They started shutting down, first one shop, and then another, and then another," she says.

At about that time, Claudie and Rebecca split up, and Ricky started giving his mother problems. "When he was about thirteen, he got to the point where I couldn't control him," she says. "He wouldn't do nothing you told him to do. Nothing. He still don't do nothing you want him to do. I think it's just the person, you know?" When Ricky was in eighth grade, he was expelled from school. He spent his days and nights knocking around in an environment, mostly in Beecher, that increasingly afforded trouble. "Everybody was doing drugs," Rebecca recalls. "I mean, they was selling on *every* street corner." Claudie and Rebecca reunited and got out of Flint, settling in the quiet town of St. Helen, in central Michigan, near where Rebecca's mother had retired. Ricky showed up every once in a while. And then one day Rebecca's .12-gauge shotgun went missing, and Claudie found a pawn ticket in Ricky's wallet. Rebecca had her son arrested. Ricky was convicted of larceny in February, 1990.

When Ricky got out of prison, in 1992, he returned to Flint and took up with a woman named Sandy Bonter. Her courtship with Ricky was even less romantic than Veronica's roof-repair liaison. "He was just going down the street," Sandy recalls, with a measure of embarrassment. "I was walking home to my house from going to the store, and he just came up and we just started talking and . . . He moved in with me, and that's how it all started." Sandy, who had a daughter, became pregnant, and bore another daughter, Amanda. As with Tammy, Ricky made proving his paternity a chore. But Sandy had a more serious problem with Ricky than child support. "He's a very abusive man," she says. "He's just very violent and very evil, and you can't trust anything, because one way or another he'll get even with you." When Sandy was pregnant with Amanda, she and Ricky got into an argument, and he dragged her across the floor and hit her with a broom. The court ordered him to undergo counselling and attend a domestic-violence intervention program, Sandy says, but Ricky did not change. "He would cut my phone lines to the house, so that I couldn't call the cops. If he would come back to the house drunk or high, he would just snap and thought that I was his personal punching bag or choking bag, or something. Anything to hurt me." Eventually, Sandy received a personal-protection order from the court, requiring Ricky to keep his distance, but as recently as last month, when we talked, she said Ricky had stormed over to her house in a contentious mood and screamed at her.

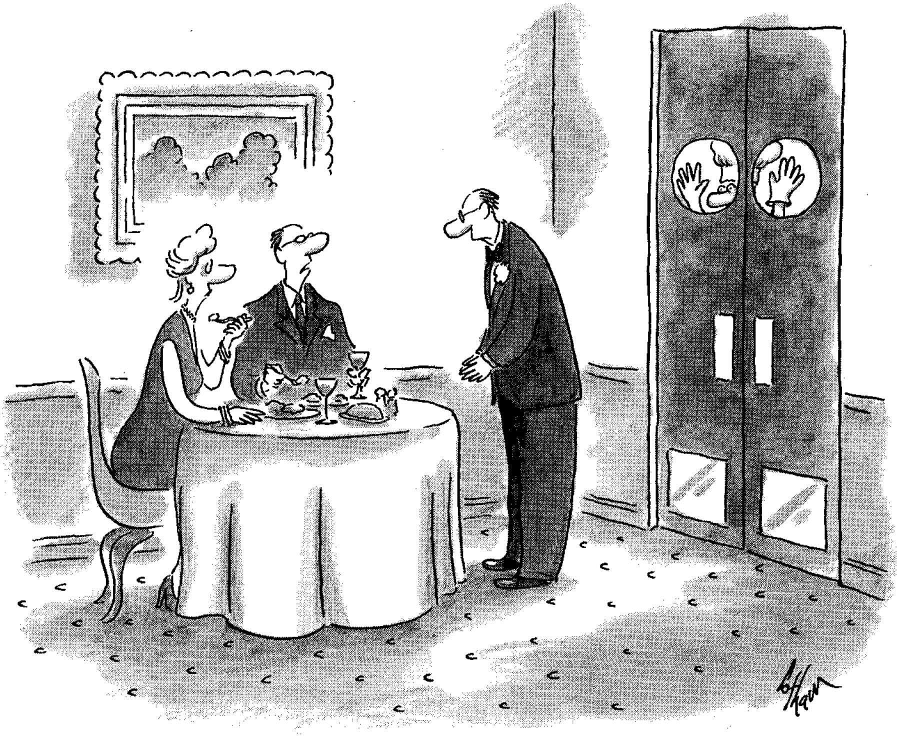
On May 12, 1994, Veronica gave birth to a daughter at Flint's Hurley hospital, and named her Kayla Renee Rolland. "Kayla looks just like all of Ricky's other kids," Ricky's mother, Rebecca, says. "They all resemble one another very much. That was Ricky's little girl." Ricky, characteristically, denied paternity and fought Veronica's efforts to collect child support until Kayla was more than two years old and a blood test proved that he was her father. He agreed to pay Veronica forty-three dollars a week in support—a meaningless agreement, since he rarely held a job for long. Ricky saw Kayla only a few times in her life, most of them during court appearances. But soon none of this mattered much to Veronica, who had run into a remarkable spot of good luck—a miracle, really, under the circumstances. She met a decent man, and married him.

Mike McQueen was a Flint native who had lived in Beecher as a boy and was well acquainted with the community's fractured ties: he didn't meet his own father until he was sixteen. He escaped Flint by joining the Navy. After his discharge, he roamed the country. In Texas, he was married and divorced. Then he came home to Flint and met Veronica. He liked Veronica's kids, and they liked him. Veronica had been living with Ricky's girlfriend Tammy, but now she found a small, two-bedroom house near her parents' home, outside Flint, and Mike moved in. Mike had no steady job, but he was handy and had a way of making ends meet.

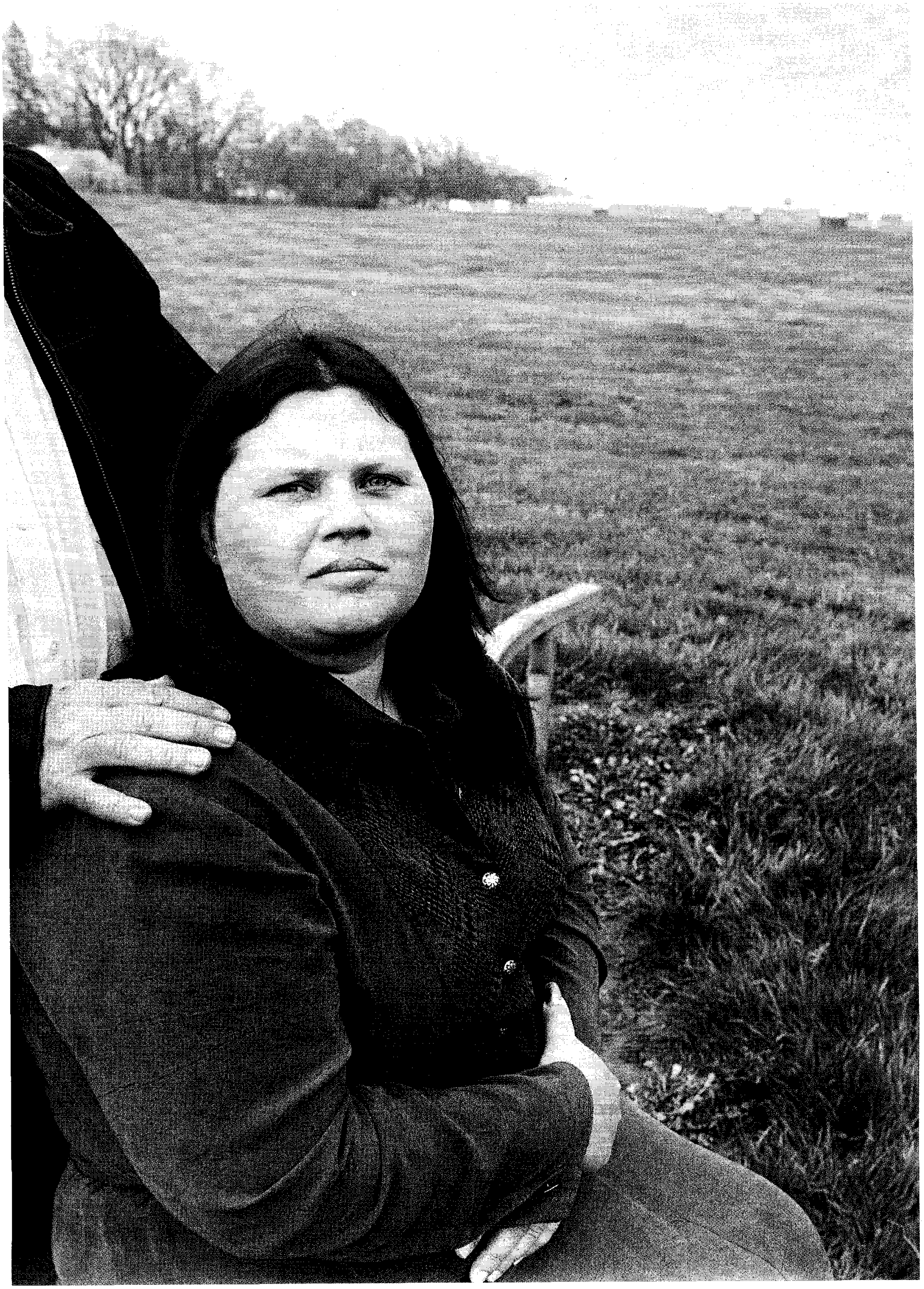
When Mike and Veronica got married, in June, 1997, they were a family of five living in Veronica's tiny place. Mike's mother, who owned houses in Beecher, leased one to Mike and Veronica, on Princeton Street, with the understanding that they would buy it over time. It seemed like a good foothold while they worked their way up and out of Beecher. There were trees in the front yard and a garage with a basketball hoop for Jonathan. And the house had a good location—next to a field, which gave them a sense of having space. "We didn't hear the gunfire at night," Veronica says.

TAMARLA'S STORY

Tamarla Winfrey had prospects. She was intelligent and attractive, and, despite an unsettled upbringing—shifting between Flint, where her mother lived with a boyfriend, and St. Louis, where her father lived—she managed to stay in school and earn a high-school diploma. When she was a teen-ager, Tamarla hoped for a career in the military. She had seen Army commercials on TV emphasizing racial diversity, and was



"You might want to do a rubber-glove count."



Veronica McQueen at Buell Elementary School. Hours after her daughter Kayla died, the White House tried to reach her.

struck by one that boasted, "We do more before 9 A.M. than most people do all day." Tamarla enlisted in the Army in 1989, her senior year in high school, joining the Reserve, where she learned to file on weekends and did some other office chores. She pledged to report to basic training when she graduated.

But there was a man named Chico in St. Louis, and during a visit there after graduation Tamarla got pregnant. That effectively ended her Army career, and she returned to Flint, and to her mother's house. Tamarla's mother liked to party; her place was a thoroughfare, and Tamarla would shut herself in her room. That's where she was, taking a nap, the day that Dedric Darnell Owens came banging at the door. Dedric, a burly and imposing figure, lived next door and had come looking for Tamarla's mother. Tamarla, roused from her nap, slammed the door in his face. He called her a bitch, and left, but not for good.

After Tamarla had her baby—a boy she named Chico, for his absent father—Dedric's visits became more frequent, and Tamarla began to welcome them. When she was low on money, Dedric would pay for Pampers or milk. He had a job at the Vlasic pickle factory, and he said he didn't mind helping out whenever Tamarla needed him. By the summer of 1993 (the summer that Veronica met Ricky Rolland), Dedric had promised Tamarla that he would always "be there whenever I needed him, in good times and bad," and she was inclined to believe him. She had become pregnant again, and delivered Dedric's son at the Hurley hospital on May 5, 1993—a week to the day before Kayla Rolland was born.

About a year later, just before Tamarla's next child, a daughter named Khadijah, was born, she and Dedric went to Las Vegas and got married. Dedric agreed to adopt Chico, but life was getting crowded—they were living at his mother's house—and Tamarla and Dedric found a place of their own, a small bungalow on Genesee Avenue, in Beecher. The rent was three hundred dollars a month.

Tamarla was pleased with her new situation, and she tried to believe that Dedric would be a good father to her kids. Sometimes at night, when she was in her room watching television, Dedric would turn out all the lights in the house and play hide-and-seek with the boys. "He loved playing with the kids," Tamarla says. "He was a good father. When he was home." As it turned out, hide-and-seek pretty much epitomized Dedric as a father. He had three other children by two other women, and had been summoned to appear in court in child-support disputes. In October of 1992, when they were together, Dedric hadn't shown up at her mother's place, and he hadn't called. The next day, Tamarla found out why: he had been arrested on a murder charge. He and his brother, Darren, had been at their mother's house when two women came rushing to the door, pleading for help. They said they'd been in a car outside, smoking crack with a man who pulled a knife on them. Darren and Dedric confronted the man, whose name was Manley Deshong. There was a fight, and Deshong was beaten and kicked to death. Both Owens brothers were arrested, and Darren was sent to prison for second-degree murder. The charges against Dedric, who said he was a bystander, were dismissed.

"*We* didn't get into fights," Tamarla explains now. "But with other people he was violent. He did like to fight."

Tamarla says that it was Dedric who brought drugs into her life. In 1995, according to Tamarla, she and Dedric and the kids went to a party for Tamarla's mother at her house. A wild crowd was there, and after a while Tamarla went to her old room. The next thing she knew, she was being arrested on a drug charge. A police narcotics team had stung the party, planting marked bills with an informant, who bought crack, and then left. When the police raided the house that night, they found one of the marked bills in Tamarla's possession. They arrested Dedric on drug charges. Tamarla says now that she had the marked bill, a twenty, only because she had made change for her mother earlier in the evening, and that she doesn't know how her mother got the bill. Apparently, the authorities believed her; the charge against her, intent to deliver cocaine, was dropped.

Dedric was not so lucky. He was charged with intent to deliver cocaine, and was sent to prison for fifteen months, with four years' probation. Khadijah was thirteen months, and her brother had just turned two. Around the same time, Dedric was also sentenced on a burglary charge, and he got a lecture from Genesee Circuit Judge Duncan M. Beagle.

"I want you to take your life's experiences, which haven't been positive, and give them some direction, 'cause what's going to happen to some of those kids if they aren't given proper direction?" Beagle asked Owens.

"They'll end up just like me," Owens responded.

"Thank you very much. And then I gotta be dealing with [your children] and I'm going to have to sit there and they're going to be crying that their dad didn't have nothing to do with their life, and it's the same old vicious cycle."

Two years later, in September, 1997, Dedric was convicted on another burglary charge and was sentenced to serve forty-two months to seven years in prison. At home, Tamarla's middle child became a handful, defying her and displaying an alarming temper. He made so much noise at night, hollering and throwing things at his brother, that Tamarla took to putting him in the kitchen at bedtime. He would sit by himself and stew until he fell asleep at the table.

A SPECIAL DAY

In 1990, a Republican, John Engler, was elected governor of Michigan, winning on a platform that included the promise of welfare reform. Michigan, in its rust-belt recession, offered a tempting laboratory for social-policy experimentation, and both Veronica and Tamarla were apt candidates for reform.

Engler's program, which came to be known as Work First, was implemented in stages. In its early days, the program urged welfare recipients to volunteer to work in exchange for benefits. Later, it required them to work—twenty hours per week at first, then thirty hours. Participants attended orientation seminars in which they were told that the state expected each of them to become employed. The state set up work-training classes, and reimbursed families for a portion of their day-care expenses. (A family of five, like Tamarla's, can earn up to thirty thousand dollars or so and still have ninety-five per cent of its day-care costs paid by the state.) On paper, at least, the Michigan experiment looks successful. When welfare reform officially began there, in 1992, the state's welfare caseload was two hundred and twenty-five thousand recipients; the caseload reported this April was seventy-two thousand, the lowest since April, 1970. Since October, 1992, a quarter-million welfare cases have been closed because recipients have gone to work. (At the same time, the state's expenditures on day care have risen from about forty-seven million dollars a year to four hundred million.)

Inevitably, the welfare-to-work transition imposes enormous stress on the people living through it. Veronica had never held a wage-earning job, and she had no idea how to fill out a job application. When the welfare-reform program was still in its volunteer stage, she enrolled in its classes, taking Kayla with her. The place where the classes were held had a big sign-up sheet with a long list of names of potential employers, and Veronica carefully filled out several applications and returned them at the end of each week. And one day she got a job. It was grim work—third-shift dishwasher at a local restaurant—and the pay was barely minimum wage, but it was transforming. "It was the first time I'd really worked," Veronica says. "Other than that, I'd been a mom since I was real young. My kids were getting older, and they knew payday was Tuesday. They knew that was like a special day, where, after I cashed my check, and it just happened to be one of my days off, we took them to the park, or we went to McDonald's, or something special like that."

Soon Veronica got a better job, making plastic parts for a medical-supply manufacturer. She learned how to work, and she even learned the trick of job mobility. In time, she took another job, with still higher pay, at a company that taught her how to solder, and that boosted her income again. Now that she is off assistance, she speaks of her experience with the fervor of a convert. "I found a way to make it," she says. "I love going to work. I'm excited about something new every day."

Having Mike around made the transition easier. The occasional home-repair jobs he took on allowed him to control his schedule, which meant that someone was there for the kids when they went to and from school. The family developed a daily routine, with Veronica up and out of the house sometimes as early as three-fifteen if she was working a ten-hour shift at her plant, an hour away. Mike's alarm would ring at six-thirty, rousing Elizabeth, whose job was to get Kayla up and moving. Kayla, the indulged baby of the family, would drag a blanket into the living room, resisting all efforts to dress until the last minute. Mike liked to get the kids out the door each day by seven-thirty, so they'd get to school in time for the meal program. "One less meal a day we had to worry about having at the house," Mike says.

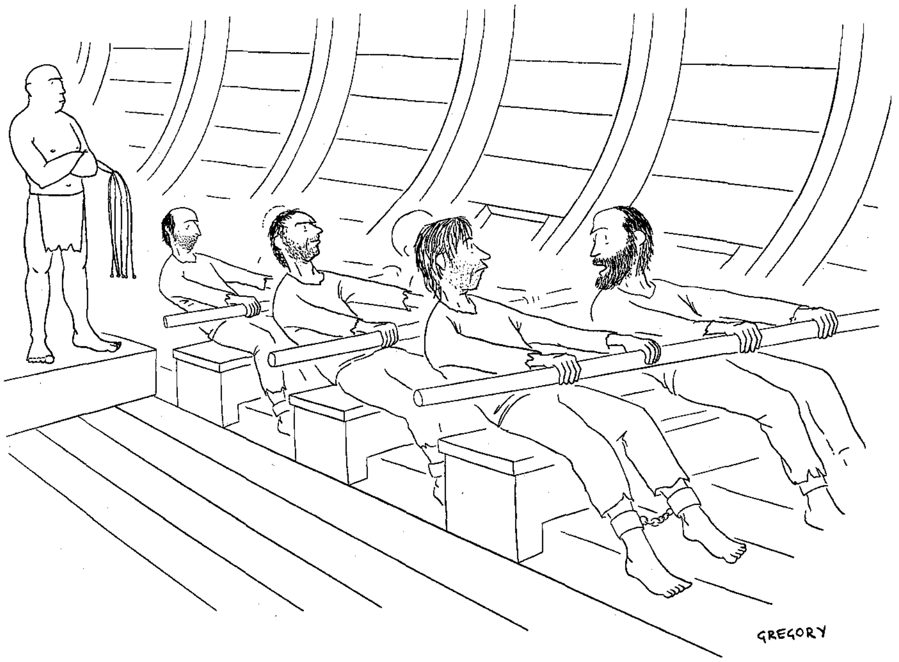
Mike made the kids follow a precise route to and from school—a path that avoided a local halfway house. "When the kids were at school, I always felt safe," he says.

Money was tight, and Mike was the family skinflint. Elizabeth had to avoid pricey brand names when she shopped for clothes, and dinner out meant McDonald's. But the McQueens were able to save, and Mike and Veronica dared to begin to make plans, most of which centered on one overriding ambition: to pay off the Princeton house and get out of Beecher.

Tamarla had a less easy time in the transition from welfare to work. She had been on state assistance since she was nineteen, when she got pregnant with Chico and decided she didn't want to be away from her new baby in order to work. "I wanted to see him grow," she says. "I wanted to be part of his first words, his first time walking, his first time drinking out of a cup, eating with a spoon. I wanted to be a part of all of that. If I was working, I would have missed out on a lot. So I just chose not to work at that time." She began receiving assistance just before the birth. "It worked out pretty good. I'd get paid for going to the doctor." She received a check every two weeks, and food stamps.

In November, 1998, with Dedric in jail and Khadijah, Tamarla's youngest, enrolled in preschool, Tamarla's caseworker told her that her exemptions had ended, and that she would have to report to Work First or lose her benefits. Tamarla went, but she resented the programmatic nature of it. "If you're not working, you have to go sit in these classrooms for thirty hours a week, doing basically nothing," she says. "They're gonna get some time out of you one way or another."

But by January of 1999 Tamarla had a job, and almost immediately she took a second job, too. She began selling merchandise at Dick Clark's American Bandstand restaurant, at Great Lakes



"Gruelling as this is, it's not a total-body workout."

Crossing, a huge outlet mall in Auburn Hills, twenty-one miles from Flint, and she made fudge at a place called the Fudgery, at the same mall. This last job aroused unexpected associations for Tamarla, who remembered going as a girl to the train station in St. Louis every weekend to watch fudgemakers perform their elaborate routine, clowning and putting on a show for customers. It turned out that Tamarla was a natural at it.

"Getting U.S.D.A. approval means a lot to you, doesn't it?"

She loved her jobs, but going to work brought new stresses, and exacerbated old ones. Tamarla had to take a bus to Auburn Hills, which meant that she was away from home for ten hours a day. She benefitted from subsidized day care for the kids, but money still seemed an irremediable problem. Work First didn't teach money-management skills. After Dedric was sent to jail in 1997, Tamarla's brother, whose name was Sir Marcus Winfrey, had moved in with her for a bit, and, he later told police, he made extra money by selling ten-dollar portions of crack. Tamarla wanted her kids to have a good Christmas, and she accepted some of the money, and even participated in some of the transactions, she told me. In October of 1998, the local narcotics squad raided the house, and found marked money in one of Tamarla's shoes. Sir Marcus told police that she had stopped selling crack months before, and she wasn't charged.

Tamarla had saved nearly a thousand dollars, but found herself falling behind in her rent payments. There was the water bill and the electricity, and the kids were always leaving the light switches on and running a second tubful of water when the first bath turned cool. They were starting to get to her. Once, when Chico was rude to an adult, Tamarla smacked him across the face so hard that the next day he started bleeding in school. This prompted a visit from a social worker with child-protective services. Tamarla explained to the social worker what had happened. The incident went down in her file as a "substantiated" case of abuse.

Tamarla's middle child was especially worrisome. He was aggressive, even violent; on one occasion he jabbed a schoolmate in the neck with a pencil. Another day, he reportedly brought a cigarette lighter to school. Such incidents got him disciplined several times, and his first-grade teacher, Alicia Judd, separated him from the rest of the class, moving his desk away from the other students up to the front of the classroom, next to her. When school officials expressed concern to Tamarla, she acknowledged that the boy had problems with anger and aggression, and urged them to try a soft touch with him. "They would just tell me about how aggressive he was," she says. "And all I could tell them was 'He likes to be hugged. Maybe if you tried hugging him instead of pushing him away, maybe you'd get better results.' My mother told him one day, 'You get five hugs a day, five kisses a day. You overexceed your five, you're working into the next day's hugs and kisses.' He didn't care. He wanted a hug every five minutes."

In February of this year, Tamarla's life fell apart. On the twentieth, police spotted Dedric, who had been paroled at Christmas, cruising a hooker, and tried to pull him over. He led them on a twenty-minute chase through Flint until he was stopped by the police. He was sentenced to seven months in jail. (Since being in prison, he has been indicted, with his mother, two sisters, and several others, for conspiring to distribute crack.)

The day after Dedric's arrest, February 21st, was Tamarla's deadline for vacating the house on Genesee: she had fallen more than six months behind on rent, even though she was holding down two jobs. Her landlord "really worked with me," she says. "But once you get behind on rent it is really hard to catch up." Tamarla says that she failed to find another house, and that she couldn't turn to her mother, who had taken a job working nights, or to her sister, who had gone back to school, so she asked her brother, Sir Marcus, to help. She knew that his ratty house, on Juliah Avenue, wasn't the sort of home that the social workers would approve of—Sir Marcus and his friend Jamelle James, who spent a lot of time there, were regular marijuana users—but it was just a couple of blocks away, and she wanted the kids to be able to stay at the Buell school. Although it was later reported that the boys were made to sleep on a couch, she says that Sir Marcus gave up his own bed to them, and saw to it that they were bathed and walked to school every day. She thought the arrangement would be only short-term.

Meanwhile, the school had been after Tamarla to get her sons into therapy, and she arranged an appointment with a local counselling center called Insight. Tamarla and the boys missed their first appointment, but they met with an Insight therapist on February 22nd. The therapist talked with the boys and with Tamarla, and afterward she told Tamarla that the six-year-old

"I don't know why. I just suddenly felt like calling."

• •

needed to see a staff psychiatrist. She scheduled an appointment for him for the following Tuesday, February 29th.

THE SHOEBOX

On the morning of the twenty-ninth, the McQueen household followed its usual routine. Veronica was out of the house and at work by the time everyone else got up, and Kayla was the last to rise. Kayla told Mike that she didn't want to go to school that day, but it was a familiar plaint; she missed kindergarten, where school had lasted only until midday. Finally, she dressed herself in a pair of bluejeans and a flowered shirt, pulled on pink boots and a coat, and walked to school with her brother and sister, following Mike's route.

Across town, Tamarla, who was staying with friends, caught the 9 A.M. bus to the mall, where she stopped to open the Fudgery, and then reported for work at Dick Clark's. On Juliah Avenue, Tamarla's boys were getting themselves up and about, and the six-year-old had something special on his mind. Jamelle James, whom the boys called Uncle Mel, had a gun in the house, and the boy later testified that he had seen him twirling it on his finger, like a cowboy. It was a Davis Industries P32 semiautomatic .32-calibre pistol, with a six-shot magazine slotted in the grip. It was the size of a child's hand, less than five and a half inches long and four inches high, and weighed just twenty-two ounces. Its retail price was eighty-seven dollars and fifty cents, which put it in the category of a Saturday-night special. (The manufacturer's Web site called it "the original pocket pistol.") On Monday night, the boy had taken the gun, which had been stashed in an open shoebox filled with quarters, and hidden beneath a pile of dirty clothes. Now, dressed for school, he fetched the gun—with three bullets in its magazine, its safety off—stuffed it in his trousers, and headed for school.

Later, there was much speculation about why the boy had taken the gun to school. He told his mother, "Some little girl been picking with me." A story circulated at school that he'd tried to kiss Kayla on Monday, and she had spit at him, and now he wanted to settle the score. It's just as likely that he brought the gun to school for the same reason he once brought a cigarette lighter—he thought it would be fun.

Chico saw his little brother with the gun. He later testified that he told either Sir Marcus or Uncle Mel about the incident, but he was not believed. When the boys got to Buell Elementary, the six-year-old apparently showed the gun to some of his pals, and Chico went to a teacher and reported that his little brother had a gun with him; somehow, Chico's alert went unheeded. School officials vehemently deny this assertion.

When the morning bell rang, the little boy filed in to Room 6 with the other kids, still hiding the gun. Although the Beecher School District is one of the poorest in the state, Buell Elementary has a computer lab. Computer class started at nine-forty-five, so at about nine-forty the class began filing out of Room 6 into the hallway, with Alicia Judd, the teacher. The boy straggled behind in the classroom, along with Kayla and a few other kids. Accounts of the child witnesses vary, but it seems that the boy pointed the gun at one child, then wheeled and faced Kayla. "I don't like you, Kayla," he said. Then he fired the gun.

The bullet hit Kayla in the right arm below the shoulder and entered her chest, then passed through her body and lodged in the floor of the classroom. The boy dropped the gun into his desk and ran out into the hall.

Judd hurried back into her classroom, and, kneeling by Kayla's side, dialled 911 on a cell phone. It was nine-fifty-three. "I have a student at Buell school that has been dying," she told an emergency operator. "I need an ambulance immediately. . . . Oh God, please, she's getting white. . . . The little girl is getting white." Judd told the dispatcher that she knew CPR but that she couldn't remember how to administer it. The dispatcher asked where the girl had been shot. "I can't tell. I'm scared to turn her body," Judd said. "Oh God, please Lord, please. I can't feel a pulse. Her eyes are rolling back into her head. It's like she's trying to get air."

Paramedics arrived within six minutes. They worked on Kayla, but the bullet had pierced her lungs and heart. The paramedics lifted her onto a stretcher, put her in the ambulance, and drove her to the Hurley hospital.

Veronica got a call at work from Mike's father, whom the school had chased down because there was no one at home at the McQueens' house. He told Veronica that there had been an accident involving Kayla, and that she was at Hurley. Assuming that Kayla had fallen and maybe taken a bump on the head, Veronica drove back to Flint, but when she got to the hospital she didn't see Mike or his father, or anyone else whom she recognized. She gave a nurse her name and asked to see Kayla, but the nurse led her into a private waiting room, where Veronica saw her father-in-law and the hospital chaplain. That's when she knew something more than a schoolyard accident had befallen Kayla. "I just felt in my heart—I felt in my heart that something was totally more wrong than I had imagined."

The hospital staff tried to calm Veronica, who was edging toward hysteria, and they coaxed her into the room. They told her that a doctor wanted to speak with her, and that reassured her. "I was figuring that it wasn't as bad as I was thinking," she says. "So I was going to wait and listen to what the doctor had to say." A few minutes later, an emergency-room doctor, a woman, arrived and said to Veronica, "Your daughter is in our trauma unit."

"And I said, 'O.K., a trauma unit.' I figured, Well, maybe she hit her head harder than I expected, harder than what I was figuring. I thought maybe it was a head injury. And I said, 'O.K.' And then she told me that she was shot. Shot. And I just did not believe it. And I looked at her, and I said, 'O.K., she's shot.' But I'm still thinking she's O.K. She's shot, but . . . I said, 'Well, how is she?' And that's when the doctor told me she was gone. And I was totally unprepared to hear that."

Veronica asked to see Kayla, and was led to the trauma unit. Inside, Kayla's body was laid out on a table, dressed in a hospital gown. "They let me see her," Veronica remembers. "And I still couldn't believe that she was gone. I just could not see that."

Mike had been out that morning running errands with his sister-in-law, and had stopped at Buell when he saw, amid a commotion of emergency vehicles, kids being herded by teachers and police to a church across from the school. When he was told that Kayla had been shot, he picked up Jonathan and drove to Hurley. There a cop pulled him aside and quietly told him that Kayla had died. Mike found Veronica in the trauma room. She was standing over her daughter's body. "Veronica didn't realize I was there," he says. "I just sat there behind her. I didn't know what to do or what to say."

Tamarla was at Dick Clark's that morning, having a laugh with a co-worker, when she was summoned to the phone. It was her godsister, Vicky (Vicky's stepmother is Tamarla's godmother), who had heard a news bulletin about the shooting at Buell, and said she thought that Tamarla's six-year-old might have been hurt. Tamarla missed the eleven-o'clock bus back to Flint. A cab ride costs sixty dollars. She felt an asthma attack coming on. She happened to see another manager from the Fudgery. He offered to drive her to Flint. When she got to Hurley, Tamarla told the receiving nurse who she was and said that she wanted to see her son, who she believed had been shot. The nurse told her that only a little girl had been shot at Buell, and that she had died. Tamarla caught a ride to Buell, where a preschool teacher told her that her son was at the police department. A photographer started snapping pictures of Tamarla as she left for the police station. At the station, she found her son in a detectives' room, being questioned. A television set was on, tuned to a channel that was broadcasting a report about the shooting.

"He ran to me. He was, like, 'Mama!' " Tamarla recalls. "He gave me a hug and a kiss, and I asked him what happened. He was, like, 'I shot a little girl.' "

In all the confusion that morning, this was the first time that Tamarla heard what her son had done. "It was from his mouth," she said. "And I started crying. And he was, like, 'Oh, Mama, I really didn't mean to. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shoot her.' I don't think he knew that she was . . . I don't think he knew what happened." When he saw his mother crying, the boy, for the first time that day, started crying, too.

At the Genesee County jail, the shooting was the day's big news among the inmates. Reports on the radio didn't say who the shooter was, but Dedric Owens knew without being told. As soon as he heard about the shooting, "a very cold, sickening feeling came over him," Sheriff Robert Pickell, who talked to Dedric later that night, recounts. "I asked why, and he said, 'Because I knew it was my son.' " Pickell says that Dedric told him that night about the boy's troubles in school, and said that when he'd asked his son why he would stick another child with a pencil he told him, "Because I hate them." The sheriff asked Dedric if he had ever talked to the school about his boy. "He said, 'I intended to, but never got around to doing it.' "

Ricky Rolland was at Sandy Bonter's house that morning, when he heard

LE CHAT
KOREN

"Go ahead. Press one for more options."

about Kayla from another girlfriend, Tammy Lynn Fortin, who paged him with the news. The next day, he began hunting for a lawyer.

MONEY TIME

Kayla Rolland, who was buried in a donated casket, had lived her short life at the edge of poverty. In death, however, she became someone of incalculable worth.

While Veronica and Mike were still at the hospital with Kayla, Mike's mother told them that they had better think about protecting their interests. They didn't know a lawyer, so she suggested one—a local personal-injury specialist she'd once hired named J. Dallas Winegarden, Jr. Within forty-eight hours, Winegarden had filed a petition in probate court asking that Veronica be named "sole personal representative" of Kayla's estate. At that time, the child's estate consisted of the few clothes and toys that she left behind. (She was buried in a pair of jeans.) But Winegarden felt that naming a personal representative was important to what would inevitably follow—wrongful-death lawsuits against the gunmaker, the school, the state, and whatever other entity could be obliged by a jury to compensate for the "loss of society and companionship" of Kayla.

"In our system of justice, the only way we have of compensating people for these tragic, devastating, horrible things is money," Winegarden says. "Obviously, when you have more money, life hopefully will be better."

The personal representative of Kayla's estate would be in charge of distributing any settlement or award among the "interested parties" to Kayla's estate. There things got complicated for Winegarden, because in Michigan "interested parties" include any members of a family who are directly related to the deceased—parents, grandparents, and siblings. Kayla had no full brothers and sisters, but her tangled family tree contained at least nine interested parties, any one of whom could hire a lawyer and make a case. Winegarden himself had difficulty tallying a precise count: there were Jonathan and Elizabeth, Veronica's children by George Allen; Nicholas, Tammy Lynn Fortin's son by Ricky Rolland; Amanda, Sandy Bonter's daughter by Ricky; Veronica

MILD THING *Seattle's Experience Music Project, a rock museum bankrolled by the Microsoft billionaire and Hendrix devotee Paul Allen, opened last week to mixed reviews.*

and her mother; and Ricky and his parents. There was also word that Ricky had taken up with a new girlfriend and had fathered another child.

Winegarden avoided some potential complications by having Veronica persuade Sandy and Tammy to sign petitions supporting her as Kayla's sole representative, on the promise of a future trust fund for their children. He did not, however, secure any such waiver from Ricky Rolland. The day after Kayla's death, Ricky got in touch with a Southfield, Michigan, attorney named Geoffrey Fieger, best known for his representation of Jack (Dr. Death) Kevorkian, and as the failed 1998 Democratic candidate for governor. But Fieger is also a fierce plaintiff's attorney, with a record of winning huge awards in wrongful-death lawsuits. The week Kayla died, Fieger appeared with Ricky and announced that he had been engaged by Ricky to seek co-personal-representative status in the matter of Kayla's estate, and that he would launch an investigation into the circumstances of her death. Fieger said that a lawsuit against the gunmaker was one possible outcome. He emphasized, however, that his case was not about money: "I'm going to investigate because I'm interested in social justice, in examining the cause of this—not just to sue someone." Fieger briefly allowed reporters access to his client, which was a bit awkward, because questions about Ricky's criminal record, spousal abuse, and absence from Kayla's life kept coming up. "I haven't been the best father," Ricky confessed. He has not been granting interviews since.

Fieger said he found it "shocking" that Winegarden had rushed to court when "Kayla hasn't even been buried." But the odds were always in Veronica's favor—a fact Fieger effectively acknowledged in mid-April, when he settled the dispute with Winegarden. Veronica would be Kayla's personal representative, and Fieger would be part of Winegarden's team for any lawsuit.

Kayla had been buried, and the community had mourned. "Now it's money time," Beecher's state representative, Vera B. Rison, said.

Within a couple of weeks of Kayla's death, more than a dozen lawyers were involved in the case, but the most unexpected development came from Dedric Owens. He had retained a lawyer, Terry Bankert, who began negotiating with publishing and public-relations firms about a book or movie deal for his client. Word got out, and there was a predictable reaction, but Bankert defended his action, saying that although his jailed client grieved for Kayla, his story was the only resource he had—he had to think about protecting the interests of his own children. "We didn't invite the international media here," he said in March. "There's a tidal wave coming, and we either learn to swim or we drown." There were no takers for the Dedric Owens story.

CONDOLENCES

When the news of the shooting in Flint reached the White House, the Administration urgently undertook to find Kayla's mother, eventually enlisting the Department of Justice in the effort. That morning, the President telephoned the superintendent of Beecher's schools, Ira Rutherford. Clinton inquired about Kayla's family, and about whether they might want to receive a call from him. The President demonstrated "a tremendous amount of empathy," Rutherford later said, but people around Veronica felt that she was too distraught just then to accept his call.

Later that day, the White House telephoned the Hurley hospital and asked that the President be patched through to the McQueens. Instead, he was connected to Mike's father, who'd been so upset by events that he had suffered a minor stroke and had to be admitted to the hospital. The Administration then got in touch with the United States Attorney in Detroit, Saul Green, who got word to the Genesee County prosecutor, Arthur Busch, that the President wanted to find the McQueens. On Thursday, two days after the shooting, Busch happened to run into Veronica, her mother, and Winegarden outside the Flint courthouse, and he passed on the message. Veronica had just made her estate filing at probate court. Winegarden was happy to hear that the President wanted to talk to his client, but there were other prospects emerging, and nothing was immediately settled.

The machinery of the White House was no match for the television-network chat shows. By Thursday, NBC's "Today" show was deep in discussion with Winegarden about an exclusive appearance by Veronica. Katie Couric, the show's co-host, called Winegarden personally, and he was impressed. In the discussions with NBC, an idea emerged that struck Winegarden as being even better than a condolence call from the President—an actual visit to the White House. Couric was going to be in Washington, and someone at NBC News told the White House that Veronica was coming to town for "Today," and said that perhaps she should stop by for a visit with the President.

The White House extended an invitation to Veronica and Mike, and Winegarden accepted for them. Six days after Kayla was shot, Veronica stepped onto an airplane, for the first time in her life, and flew to Washington to meet the President and to talk on national television about her daughter's death.

As it happened, guns were on the agenda in Washington. The shooting at Columbine High School, in Colorado, the previous spring had presented a political opportunity that gun-control advocates seized, pressing new gun legislation. The House and Senate juvenile-justice bills both broadly contained most of the remedies President Clinton had publicly asked for, such as mandating child-safety locks, banning high-capacity ammo clips, and prohibiting juvenile possession of assault weapons. The two measures varied in one key respect: the Senate bill called for a three-day waiting period for a background check before a gun purchase could be completed; the House bill provided for a twenty-four-hour waiting period. Both the Republicans and the White House, for their own reasons, refused to budge on the issue, and the bill remained in conference.

Two days after Kayla's shooting, President Clinton appeared on "Today" to discuss guns. A child-trigger-lock law, he told Couric, would guarantee that "at least those guns would not be used by six-year-olds to kill other six-year-olds." This legislation, he said, was bottled up on Capitol Hill because of the "stranglehold that the N.R.A. has had on this Congress." Couric asked the President when the White House intended to schedule a gun summit with congressional leaders; the President said he hoped the summit would happen soon. "Maybe this tragic death will help," he said.

The gun summit was scheduled to be held on Super Tuesday—the same day as the White House meeting with Veronica and Mike. The Republicans Henry Hyde and Orrin Hatch trooped over to the White House with the Democrats Patrick Leahy and John Conyers, and though the Republicans felt snookered when they found out about Veronica's visit, they accepted Clinton's assurances that he wanted a bill more than he wanted an unresolved political issue for the November elections.

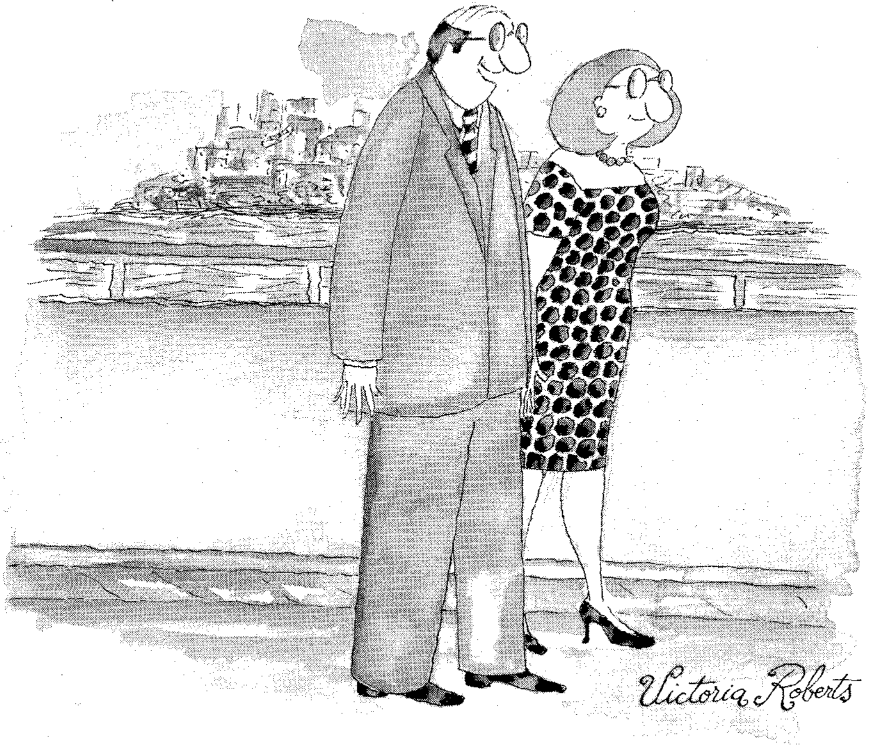
Veronica McQueen had never thought seriously about gun control. In fact, hers was a gun-owning household; Mike was a sportsman, and he kept deer-hunting rifles in the house. But when Veronica met with the President, in the Oval Office, he urged her to speak out on guns, maybe even to testify before Congress, and she was persuaded. She emerged from her meeting a convinced proponent of new gun-control laws, and though she doesn't say which specific measure she endorses, she did accept an invitation to speak at the Million Mom March, in Washington, and agreed to make a return appearance to "Today" to promote the event.

It was the kind of White House public-relations triumph that drives Clinton's adversaries, such as the N.R.A., to distraction. Lost in the political debate was the fact that the gun that killed Kayla had been purchased by a qualified owner, who passed a background check and legally registered the gun. It had been stolen from that owner's house, and then put on the streets, where it ended up in the hands of Jamelle James and Sir Marcus Winfrey. Whether they would have engaged a child-safety lock—if the gun had been equipped with one—is open to question.

In any case, Clinton's political point had been won, and when the N.R.A. executive vice-president, Wayne LaPierre, suggested, a few days later, that the President needed a certain amount of violence "to further his political agenda," Clinton was able to respond, "I'd like to see him look into the eyes of the mother of little Kayla Rolland. "

LEVERAGE

Back in Flint, Tamarla Owens learned within a day or so of the shooting that her son would not be prosecuted for Kayla's death. In effect, Tamarla was put on trial instead.



"What ever will we think about now that the genome project is almost complete?"

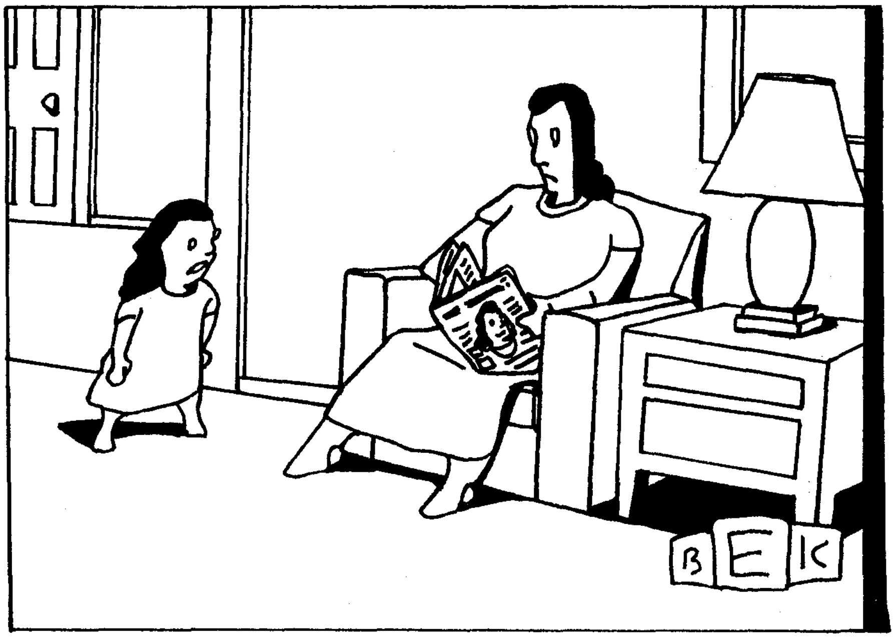
Busch, the Genesee County prosecutor, had talked to the police investigators who questioned the boy on the day of the shooting, and they told him that the boy seemed to have no real understanding of what he had done. The boy had said that the shooting happened "just like it does on television," and when the investigators finished questioning him he calmly returned to his pencil and paper and started drawing. The next day, Busch announced that the boy was too young to have formed "criminal intent," and therefore could not be prosecuted, even as a juvenile. He began referring to him as the "little guy," and said that he "needs to be hugged." But Busch, who faces reëlection this year, promised Flint that he would deliver "justice for Kayla." He began building a manslaughter case against Jamelle for allegedly showing the gun to the boy, and leaving it within his reach. (Prosecutors were eventually able to get a guilty plea only to possession of a stolen shotgun.)

The day after Kayla was shot, the state Family Independence Agency filed a petition in Family Court seeking to have custody of Tamarla's children taken from her. Busch represented the agency in court. He hoped to present to the public a resolution of the Buell tragedy that was compassionate but tough: the boy would be hugged, but the adults in his life would be made to pay for the negligence that made them complicitous in Kayla's death. Sir Marcus and Jamelle would do time in jail, and Tamarla would do time without her children. Busch didn't know Tamarla, but he hoped that she would agree to surrender custody of her children, submit to a social-and-psychological-therapy program for herself and the boy, and settle for the possibility that one day she might win her children back. Ideally, the boy would be sent to the Whaley Children's Center, an institution that was a source of local pride—part school, part therapy center for abused and neglected kids.

Busch's leverage against Tamarla was her own vexed life. A number of her missteps were enunciated in the family agency's petition to the court—Tamarla's brushes with the law ("Tamarla Owens is involved in drugs"), the wallop she had given Chico (a "substantiation in 1999 of abuse with her son Chico being the victim"), her eviction, and her decision to put her boys with Sir Marcus and Jamelle ("She knew that marijuana was being smoked daily"). The caseworker who wrote the petition, Catherine Edgar, concluded her report by offering her professional opinion that the "children are at imminent risk of harm if remaining in the care and custody of their mother."

Tamarla couldn't believe that anyone would suggest that she was a danger to her own children. "I love my kids," she kept saying. "They're all I've got, and I'm all they've got." She knew that leaving the boys at her brother's house wasn't ideal, but she'd meant it to be a temporary solution, until she found a home. She knew that Sir Marcus and Jamelle smoked weed—they were young—but they didn't do it in front of the kids. In the eight days that the boys were with their uncle, Tamarla had heard from friends who'd seen Sir Marcus walking them to school in the morning, and it had made her proud. Besides, she reasoned, her brother had represented her only option—her mother's home had its own potential perils. In truth, the environment at the Juliah Avenue house wasn't so starkly different from that of her own home when Dedric was around.

But a five-year-old girl was dead, and Tamarla's position inspired little sympathy. The custody petition helped to shape a media portrait of "the family from hell," as one columnist put it, with Tamarla at its dysfunctional center. The Detroit *Free Press* editorialized that the boy should be taken away someplace "far from" Flint, and from Tamarla. The question of whether she had the ability to raise the child properly, the paper said, "has been pretty much answered by a little girl's death."



"What did people do before they could read about the same handful of famous people over and over again?"

There was one corner in Flint that held a dissenting view about Tamarla—the back corner of the White Horse Tavern, a hangout for pols and lawyers near the downtown courthouse. There a spindly, bespectacled man named Bob Leonard maintains a sort of second office, and holds forth on issues of moment in Flint. He thinks that Tamarla Owens is being crucified by the town. "They were looking for a fall guy," he says, "and she was available." In Flint, what Bob Leonard thinks matters, because he is something close to a local legend; he gave many of the main political players in town their start.

Leonard was once the county prosecutor, a position he used to advance a political agenda that reflected his own fiercely held ideology, which was left-wing unionist. That was a safe posture for any politician in the home town of the U.A.W., a city that in 1988 gave its Presidential-caucus vote to Jesse Jackson, by a margin of nine to one. But when Leonard, whose kin were coal miners, spoke reverentially of the great 1936 sitdown strike and the important lessons it still had to teach, he wasn't posturing. He attracted a staff of young lawyers who were eager to be part of his crusade, which included starting one of the nation's first consumer-protection divisions. *Time* featured him in a story that described him as a "folk hero." And then he went to jail. In the mid-nineteen-seventies, Leonard had helped build his mother a house, and had borrowed money from a portion of the county treasury that he controlled. The "loan" wasn't discovered until much later, and Leonard had long since paid it back, but the Feds showed no mercy. He was given a maximum sentence, and spent almost four years in a federal penitentiary in Arizona. When he was released, Leonard returned to Flint, hoping to pick up where he'd left off, but his law license had been revoked, and a petition to regain it was denied. He decided to stay in Flint anyway, taking a part-time job and waging his blistering crusades on a local cable channel.

When Leonard surveyed the aftermath of the Buell shooting, he saw one of his protégés, J. D. Winegarden, travelling to the White House with his client and preparing a multimillion-dollar lawsuit, and a friend, Arthur Busch, finessing the politics of the case as he prepared for a reëlection campaign. Leonard reflexively wondered about Tamarla, and her fight to keep her kids. "She's not the perfect mother," he says. "But she's a mother." Tamarla had a court-appointed attorney, a quiet, competent lawyer named Mark Clement, but she had no one championing her cause in the political and media melee surrounding the case outside court. Leonard decided that Tamarla needed the services of another of his former staffers, Sam Riddle, Jr.

Riddle happened to be available. The son of a Flint auto worker, he had been a leader in the black-student movement at Michigan State and had once shut down a Michigan State basketball game for nearly an hour in order to read a list of grievances to a demonstrably unappreciative crowd. He had become famous as a young man, the very picture of a black radical, with an outsize Afro and fervent rhetoric about the need to restructure American society. When he got his law degree from the University of Michigan, in 1977, he returned to Flint and joined Leonard's staff. He went on to a brief life in the corporate world, as a landman to several oil companies, and then entered politics, as a campaign manager and media consultant, charging two hundred and fifty dollars an hour for his advice. Riddle is a smart, funny, lavishly profane man, who is given to sudden pique. His career in the oil business ended in midflight when he punched a company executive on the corporate jet (Riddle says the executive used the word "nigger"), and his bosses landed the plane and had him put off. He managed Geoffrey Fieger's successful run for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1998, but, when Fieger "refused to listen" to Riddle in the general-election campaign, their union ended, Riddle says, with Riddle throwing an omnipresent cell phone at Fieger (who said of Riddle at the time, "He's got severe mental problems").

When Bob Leonard called Riddle about Tamarla Owens, Riddle's first thought, he says, was an unsympathetic one: "I thought it was real straightforward—anyone who would let a six-year-old have access to guns needs to feel the full force of the law brought on her." But Riddle met with Tamarla, heard that her only objective was to reunite with her kids, and decided to take her on, without fee. (His decision had the effect of giving Riddle a singular professional specialty: he also represents Michael and Vonda Shoels, the parents of Isaiah Shoels, who was the only black victim at Columbine.)

As Riddle saw it, his job was to reverse the "mainstream-media smear" of Tamarla, burnish her image, and thus gain her a fighting chance to get her kids back. He started making her accessible to the press, and Tamarla proved to be a reasonably good spokeswoman for her own cause. Riddle developed themes for his Tamarla campaign, such as the assertion that the schoolroom tragedy proved "the failure of welfare reform in America," without quite explaining how Work First had contributed to Tamarla's eviction, which resulted from unpaid rent. "Just as hate pulled the trigger at Columbine, poverty pulled the trigger at Buell," Riddle said, and he likened Tamarla's daily bus ride to work at the Fudgery and Dick Clark's, in affluent Oakland County, to a voyage on "a slave ship as an indentured servant."

With his cell phone constantly ringing, he negotiated with the media, promising producers and reporters a straightforward Tamarla if they would include portions of the larger social message. "This woman has literally been labelled America's worst mother, and it ain't true," Riddle told a producer of the tabloid television show "Extra." "Her son and her family are victims every bit as much as Kayla's family. And what's happened to her is a manifestation of American welfare reform—it's a failure. . . . She's capable of telling her own story, but one requirement we would have is at least fourteen to eighteen seconds of what I just told you, which either myself or the attorney will speak to."

The press strategy seemed to work. On her first day with Riddle, Tamarla spoke to a local television station and to the Flint *Journal*, which carried a front-page story the next day under the headline "MOM: BOY DIDN'T MEAN TO KILL." A sort of entourage developed around Tamarla, including her godsister, Vicky, Vicky's boyfriend, Terrell, and a young man with braided hair named Nathaniel (Nate) McDaniel III. Riddle called them the Flintstones, and when "Good Morning America" wanted to book Tamarla he insisted that the Flintstones accompany her to New York. "These are the conditions," he told the producers. "This young lady cannot travel alone. She needs a security blanket. She needs the whole crew." The show flew everybody to New York.

Riddle's bedrock theme was that Tamarla was as much a victim as Veronica, and so Tamarla's rehabilitation campaign became a sort of mimicry of Veronica's public schedule. Veronica went on "Today" and visited the White House and addressed the Million Mom March; Tamarla went on "Good Morning America" and "The Queen Latifah Show" and went with Riddle to the Washington march, as part of the crowd. Through it all, Riddle insisted that Tamarla stay on message: What she wanted, all she wanted, was reunion with her kids.

Art Busch and the state family agency were adamant—Tamarla was not going to get her kids, not right away, at least. Riddle and Tamarla's court lawyer, Mark Clement, realized that total victory—an unconditional, immediate reunion—was unlikely. But they wanted the family agency's inflammatory petition toned down, creating an opening for her to coöperate in the rehabilitation of her family and the possibility for her to come back into court soon and try to regain custody of her children.

Shortly before Mother's Day, an informal deal was worked out by Riddle and Busch, at Bob Leonard's table at the White Horse Tavern. Two days later, Tamarla went back to Family Court. She admitted "non-culpable neglect," and accepted responsibility for the circumstance that had led to her son's action. The boy would attend school and therapy sessions at the Whaley Children's Center during the day, but he could live with his brother and sister, who were staying with their aunt; Tamarla could have generous visitation rights. Tamarla also agreed to submit to drug testing and to attend "life skills" classes. In exchange, the harshest language of the custody petition was edited out, and a hearing was scheduled in three months.

Veronica and Mike McQueen don't believe that they will ever return to the house on Princeton where Kayla lived. "Too many memories there," Veronica says. The community has established a trust fund for the family through their church, the Assembly of God, in North Flint. With money from the fund and the prospect of the lawsuit, there is a chance that they won't have to go back to the Princeton house. They are staying with Veronica's mother now, but they are looking for a new home out in the country, something big. "We're thinking six bedrooms," Mike says. Veronica hopes to start a foster home for troubled children.

Still, there is no turning away from her loss. At least once every day, Veronica goes off into a room by herself and cries. What pulls at her, she says, is not only the child she has lost but that piece of her own motherhood which is also gone. "With Kayla, I'm going to be missing everything," she says. "Her becoming a teen-ager, her having boyfriends, her having breakups, her crying on my shoulder about this, and me being there as a mother to help support her through all the difficult things that she'd have to do." Such has been the nature of Veronica's life that when she imagines Kayla's she sees it as a cycle of heartache.

Tamarla, meanwhile, has to prove herself a worthy mother. She visits the kids three times a week, and talks to them every day. She is preparing to move into a new home. She has gone back to work. "I felt it was time," she says. "I was bored, I got tired of sitting around the house, I got tired of being there not doing nothing. I didn't have the kids there to keep me company, so that was making it even worse."

But, even as she tries to get her life in order, Tamarla seems to be tempting fate, in at least one regard. She is involved with Nate, who is six years her junior. ("My baby," she calls him.) It turned out that Nate was a wanted man. He was wanted in the state of Texas, on at least one felony charge of forcible entry, according to federal law-enforcement officials there. Tamarla says that she didn't know this until after she became involved with him. "I didn't go all into Nate's past or nothing," she says, "because a lot of things in your past can mess up your relationship with a person."

Nate eventually came clean with Tamarla. They have discussed the matter, she says, and he promised to do whatever he must to help her. "He told me he knows just how important the kids are to me," Tamarla says. "He told my lawyer, 'If I have to go back to Texas and deal with what I gotta deal with down there, I will, just so she can get her kids back and they won't be trying to use me to get to her.'"

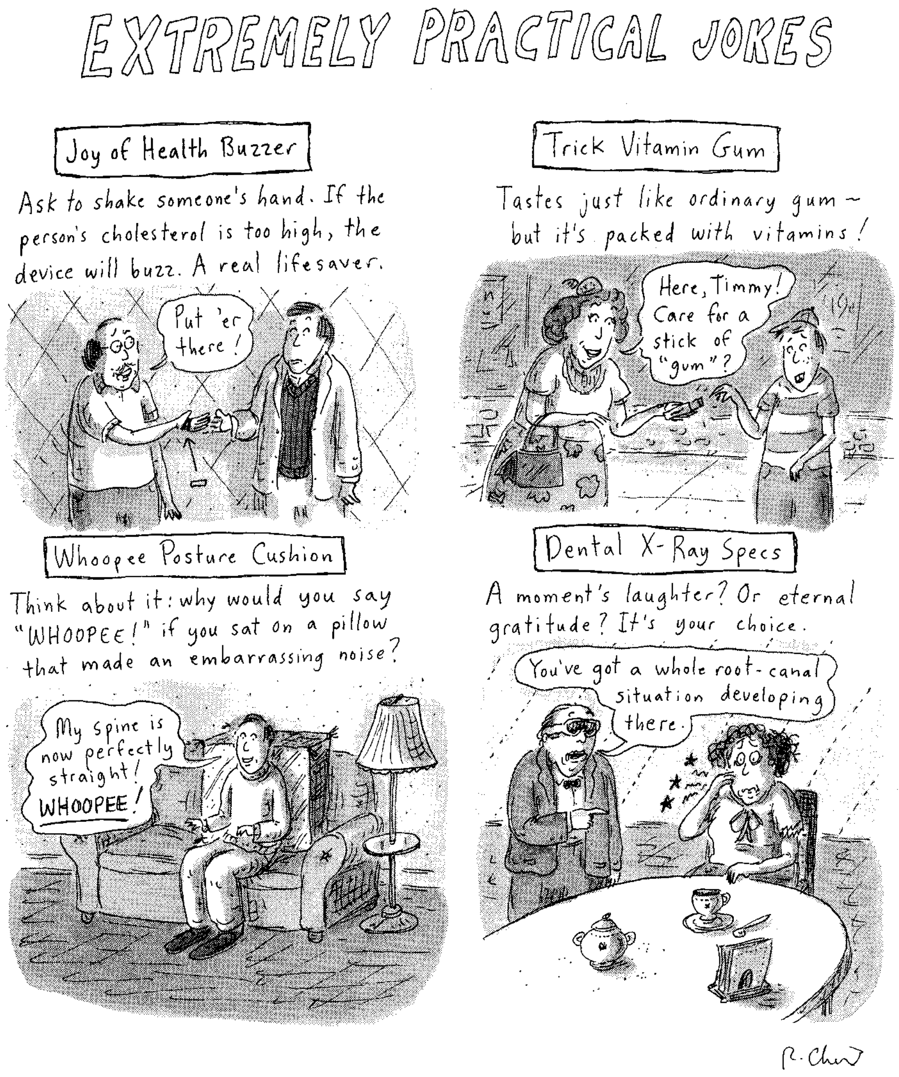
Tamarla, in turn, promised Nate that she will wait for him. "I told him, 'I'm here for you. I'm not gonna turn my back on you.'" (Indeed, last month, Nate was returned to Texas, and was jailed on charges of burglary and possession of a controlled substance.)

Sam Riddle, who has heard about Nate's troubles, shrugs and says, "What can I tell you? Tamarla has a gift for choosing the wrong men."

How Tamarla's entanglement with Nate will affect her chances to regain custody of her children is unclear. She doesn't seem particularly worried. In her understanding of the world, life isn't something that can be plotted out with any hope of having expectations met. People don't plan for bad things to happen—they just happen. Your husband goes to jail, your mother asks for change for a marked twenty-dollar bill, your new boyfriend turns out to be a fugitive from justice.

In such a world, reckoning ahead is not generally a fruitful exercise. One afternoon, as Tamarla ate ribs with the entourage at an Applebee's in Flint, it was clear that her future resides partly in the people surrounding her at that table, and that it is a precarious thing. There was Sam Riddle, who between conversations on his cell phone sipped a Jack Daniel's and posed his theory about why Tamarla is not viewed as sympathetically as the parents of the victims at Columbine. ("The difference is that Tamarla represents the underclass. Race is the dividing line.") Vicky, who has provided Tamarla with a place to stay, revealed an underlying tension between the friends, quarrelling furiously about a take-out order. And there was Nate, transfixed by a bright-yellow Humvee sitting in the parking lot—Nate, who may be Tamarla's next chance at happiness or her latest wrong move.

As the entourage chatted around her, Tamarla considered what she might do if the courts took her kids from her for good. "If they terminate my parental rights, I don't know what I would do," she said. "I love kids. I'm a high-risk pregnancy, so it would probably take me a while to get pregnant again. But I would try to have more kids, because I love my kids." ♦


EXTREMELY PRACTICAL JOKES
Joy of Health Buzzer
Ask to shake someone's hand. If the person's cholesterol is too high, the device will buzz. A real lifesaver.
Put 'er there!
Trick Vitamin Gum
Tastes just like ordinary gum — but it's packed with vitamins!
Here, Timmy! Care for a stick of "gum"?
Whoopee Posture Cushion
Think about it: why would you say "WHOOPEE!" if you sat on a pillow that made an embarrassing noise?
My spine is now perfectly straight! WHOOPEE!
Dental X-Ray Specs
A moment's laughter? Or eternal gratitude? It's your choice.
You've got a whole root-canal situation developing there.

PROFILES

FOREVER JOHNNY

How does he keep the music playing?

BY JESSE GREEN

"Do you want to see his vocal cords?" Gil Reigers asked. Reigers has been Johnny Mathis's guitarist for thirty years and his production manager for twelve. While stagehands unloaded crates of music and equipment onto the stage of Heinz Hall, in Pittsburgh, Reigers riffled through folders in his briefcase, looking for pictures of his boss's pipes.

I was curious to see what the singer's vocal cords looked like, much as I had once wanted to see Irving Berlin's jury-rigged piano. The contraptions, biological or mechanical, from which music is produced have always fascinated me as relics of the otherworldly. And "otherworldly" is not too strong a word for Mathis's sound, at least as it is preserved in his recordings from the late nineteen-fifties and early sixties. Driving to one of his concerts not long ago, I put on an early album—"Heavenly," from 1959—and pretty soon I had to pull off the road. Apart from the singer's trademark reedy quiver, so easily mockable, I don't know what I expected: a generic crooner's mellowness, perhaps, with swoopy attacks. Instead, I was startled by the voice's ambiguous, piercing yet airy tone; it sounded almost synthetic in its precision, and yet it was madly fluttering, as if panicked by its own youth and beauty. The years of campy mists that have accumulated around the singer's name dispersed with the first notes of "More Than You Know." It was hard to believe that a human male had produced these immaculate sounds, and seemingly without taking a breath. By the end of the album, I felt that Mathis had the greatest voice of his generation—one that was far better, technically, than Frank Sinatra's or Tony Bennett's or even Nat "King" Cole's. And yet this did not mean that he was the greatest *singer*. He was too recessive for that, too hidden behind his amazing technique.

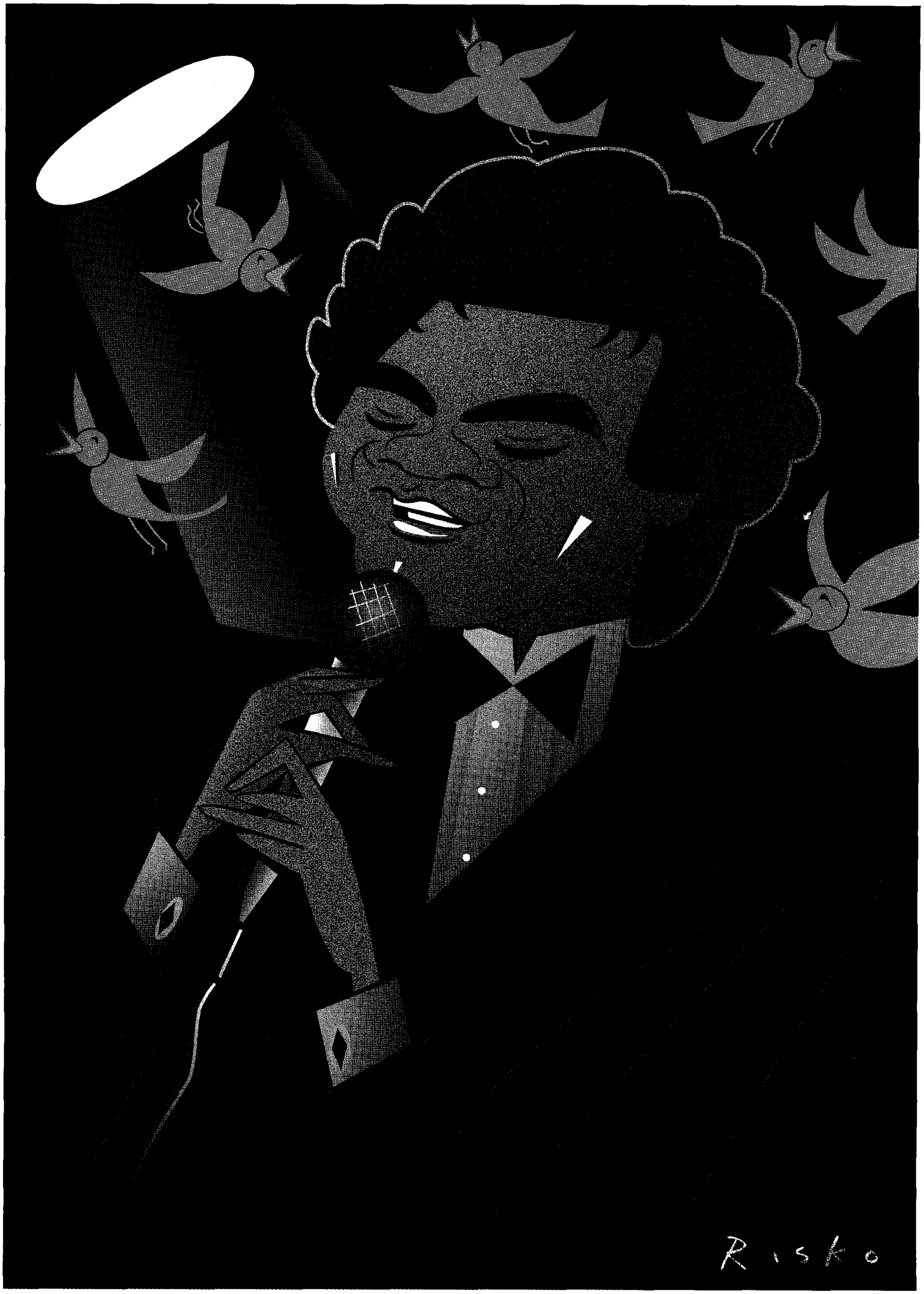
As I pulled back onto the highway, it occurred to me that this was a most unusual stance for the last of America's great crooners. Like Bing Crosby, Perry Como, Vic Damone, and others in the tradition, Mathis sings well-crafted songs filled with snappy bromides and gift-wrapped regret. But, unlike those performers, whose barroom swagger and tipsy phrasing achieve a kind of intimacy ("You can sing this way, too," they seem to say, "when you're loaded"), Mathis became a star by applying to a pop genre vocal skills that are generally associated with more serious music, and by rigorously maintaining an emotional remoteness from the sentiments he was singing about.

The velvet décor of Heinz Hall is the color of ketchup, but, compared with the huge circular arenas in which Mathis often works, it's a place of high glamour. Once a movie palace, it is now the kind of venue that Mathis most likes to play, not just because of the old-fashioned proscenium stage but because of the backup—a world-class symphony orchestra instead of a Broadway-sized pit band. Mathis's drummer and librarian, Joe Lizama, had spent the preceding days organizing music for the gig, pulling and copying dozens of additional parts for the seventeen songs (and sixteen options) that Mathis had selected from the several thousand arrangements that are stored at his office, in Burbank, California. Everything about this endeavor—the hall, the repertoire, the man at its center—was a throwback to the golden age of American song, and everything about it, I couldn't help feeling, was doomed.

But no one else seemed to think so. During a rehearsal with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Scott Lavender, the singer's music director, was confident enough to run straight through the program, repeating only a few bars, here and there, out of several thousand. The music sounded wonderful with these classical players, who knew instinctively how to build long crescendos and how to let loose without losing control. After all, the arrangements were written in the high-Hollywood style of such old showmen as Henry Mancini and Nelson Riddle, at a time when all pop singers sang with big ensembles and everyone, from kids to grownups, recognized the same culture of sound: soaring strings, sonorous brass, harp glissandi, and piquant reeds. In these orchestrations, the melodies, for the most part, were left out—good singers don't need cues—and, as I listened to the rehearsal, I realized how much rested on the missing instrument at the center of the charts. No wonder Reigers carries around pictures of Mathis's vocal cords. Although a sizable economic enterprise depends on them, nobody really understands why they do what they do. Not even Mathis could explain what accident of biology gave him the ability to sing so high, so smoothly and softly, to make yearning sound so delicious and love so heartbreaking.

"I have good genes, I guess—and the rest is training," he told me that evening. We were in a rented Jaguar driven by his valet, heading from the hotel to the hall through a steady rain. Mathis had graciously offered me a ride, but he seemed so locked up within himself that I hesitated to ask questions. From the back seat—Mathis was up front, next to the driver—I studied his reflection in the tinted windshield: his smallish, heart-shaped face; his bloodshot, wary eyes; his dimpled chin swivelling around as if he were sucking candy. (He was warming up his jaw.) For long stretches, neither of us spoke. It would take me a while to realize that silence was his natural habitat—odd for a singer whose voice had accompanied so many millions of makeout sessions in back seats all over America. But then, as he later told me, the man whom people impute from his songs and the man he actually is are not the same person. The former is a suave romancer, the latter—the person who sat, almost

ROBERT RISKO



When Mathis appeared on A&E's "Live by Request," he received the series' highest ratings, topping even Tony Bennett.

motionless, in the front seat—made me think of a line in an Emily Dickinson poem: "I'm nobody! Who are you?"

When I managed to break the silence, he was not at all abstracted. He said that he had just scrounged a dinner consisting of a banana, a plum, and—he sheepishly admitted—a Dove bar. If he had eaten ice cream before a performance, I ventured, he must have been feeling confident about his voice; dairy products are usually a singer's deadly enemy, gumming up the throat and curdling the tone. He waved that off, with a glint of machismo. "It's like sports," he said. "You just have to get the blood to the muscle." Mathis was a high jumper in college, and he gave up a chance to try out for the 1956 Olympics when Columbia Records offered him a contract. He exercises five days a week, and he tries to sing every day. Even so, it's an iffy business. "You have to find out each time all over again where the notes will be—it's always different," he said. He began making noises in several parts of his range, on various vowels—*eee, aaaw, aaah*—as if sampling the frets on a new guitar. "The uncertainty used to make me crazy with stagefright," he added. "My ritual was that I would drink a lot of champagne before performing. But it dried me out. I didn't like what it did to my voice. So I just stopped."

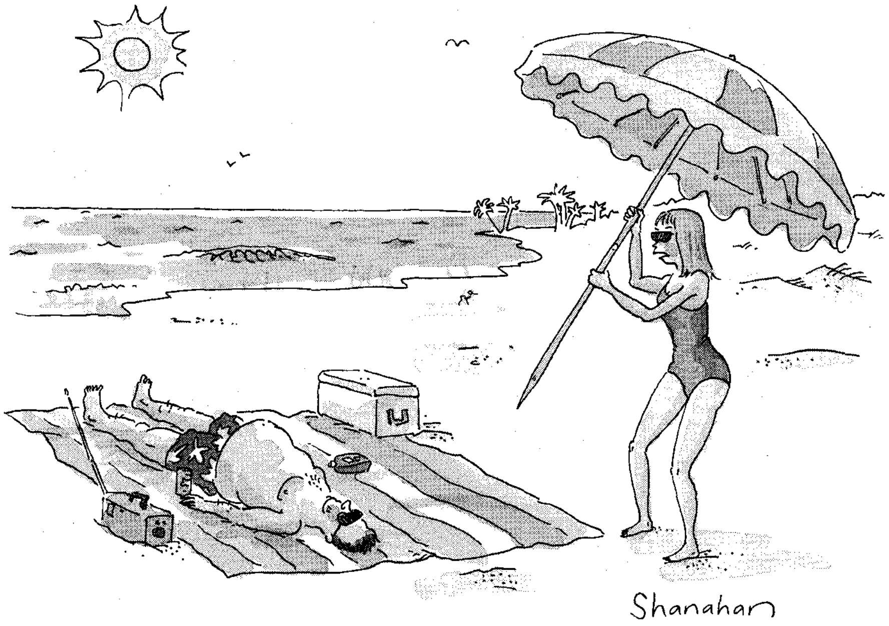
The car got stuck in the traffic snaking toward Heinz Hall's rococo entrance. As we watched the Johnny Mathis fans—mostly women—descend from their cars in the rain, he touched his poufed-up hair and said that he hoped the bad weather wouldn't spoil their evening out.

He needn't have worried. The audience of smartly dressed, carefully coiffed matrons—many with wooden-looking husbands in pastel summer jackets—seemed indifferent to the light symphonic fare on the first half of the program, but they snapped awake when, after the intermission, and without any fuss or introduction, Mathis appeared in a spotlight. He had sold out both his concerts here—he sells out virtually everywhere he tours—but I wondered how long he'd be able to do so, given the fact that many of his fans were on wobbly legs. He himself, I'd been told, was about to have both of his hips replaced—an ordeal that is now, thankfully, behind him. Still, as the women screamed, "We miss you, Johnny!" he opened his mouth, and suddenly it was 1963, when the miracle of his voice was fresh and the Beatles were an ocean away.

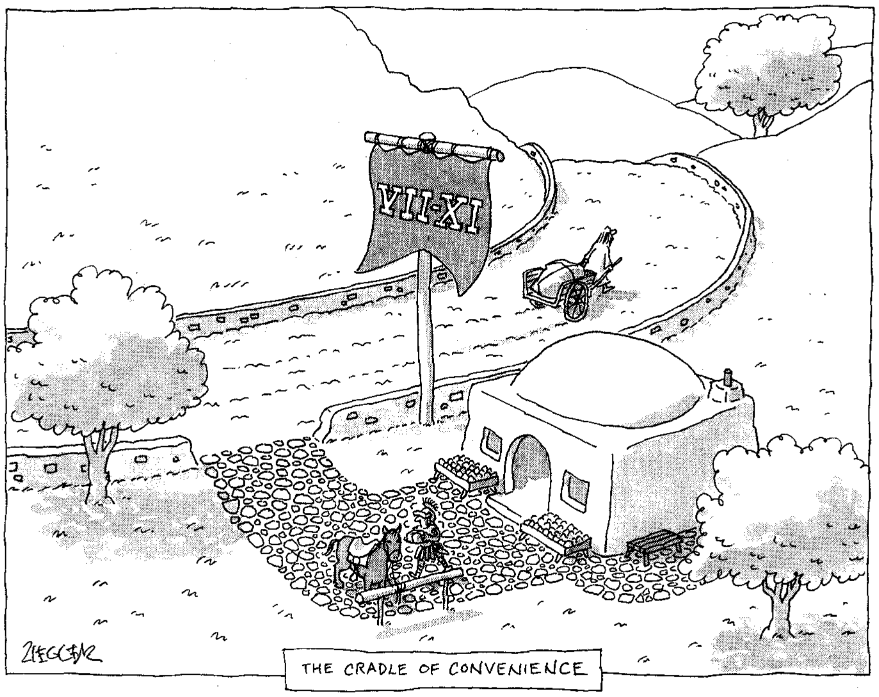
That Mathis still looks youthful at sixty-four amuses his longtime colleagues; Reigers says that his boss sleeps in formaldehyde. He doesn't look pickled, though; he looks polished. Onstage that night, his exaggeratedly broad-shouldered, double-breasted suit—one of several identically cut, bespoke outfits that he performs in—gave him an hourglass figure, and everything from his patent-leather shoes to his silk pocket square had been chosen to convey the image of the best date you could ever have, circa 1958. His repertoire, too, was minutely calibrated. He front-loaded the show with greatest hits to appease the diehards, giving them a big A-flat at the end of "Stranger in Paradise" to reassure them that he could still do it. I noticed how he used the mike to protect high pianissimo entrances like the beautiful one after the bridge of "Misty"—a note he made famous in 1959 and has sung the same way more than ten thousand times since, albeit transposed down a half step.

The haunting tone of his youth, with its hummingbird vibrato and clear sheen, was still apparent in songs like "All in the Game" and "Wonderful! Wonderful!," though his voice is darker now. Some subtleties of vocal color had disappeared, especially in dead-fish seventies numbers, like "You Make Me Feel Brand-New" and "Stop, Look and Listen to Your Heart," which lacked the rhythmic tension to support him. All in all, however, he sang astonishingly well: every note perfectly in tune, every syllable precisely pronounced, every phrase entered briskly and cut off as if with a scalpel. And although his tone had thickened over the years, losing some of its arresting strangeness, he still maintained the characteristic Johnny Mathis style. Neither arty nor funky, masculine nor feminine, black nor white, it was somehow all of these things, blended into what is one of the most distinctive and influential instruments of any American singer. (One disciple is Barbra Streisand, who shares Mathis's fondness for the long vocal line, if not his restraint in performance. "When the other kids used to listen to Elvis Presley," she once told a reporter, "I listened to Johnny Mathis, modelling my style after his.") Ordinarily, "instrument" would be too snooty a word for a crooner's chops, but Mathis's voice did sound as if it were being played; sometimes it was an oboe, sometimes an alto flute, sometimes a soprano sax. Just as one selects an appropriate outfit for a particular occasion, he found the right timbre for each song and then deployed it with an almost unnatural consistency.

Indeed, there was something mechanical about the performance, as though he were operating a winch from a distant control room. *Prepare for high note, full*



"Turn over and I'll do your back."



THE CRADLE OF CONVENIENCE

steam ahead—and out it came, as clean and clarion as you could want. When he launched into a Henry Mancini medley, the audience sighed on cue at each new chorus: "Two for the Road," "Lovers in New York," "Days of Wine and Roses," and, inevitably, "Moon River." Mathis took in the applause with a cautious half smile and offered a bit of self-deprecating patter. All told, he spoke fewer than a hundred words, most of which had to do with his offstage passion—golf. "We love you, Johnny!" "You're the greatest, Johnny!" "Come on, John, over here! Sing to us!" the audience cried, but this only prompted him to back away while the piano took up the introduction to "Misty." As he sang the opening line—"Look at me"—he winced and closed his eyes; looking at him seemed the last thing he wanted you to do.

Many stars use the spotlight to advance pet causes, if only that of their own egos, but Mathis asked nothing of his listeners except that they listen. It occurred to me that, unlike Sinatra, he was not really a romantic at all but a classicist, one concerned less with personal expression than with vocal production, breath control, enunciation, color. "I don't understand why I'm called romantic," he said after the show. "My romantic feelings are about beaches and sunsets. They're not very big or dark or serious, which is what I think people mean by 'romance.' " On a personal level, Mathis may be the least forthcoming balladeer ever. During the concert, his eyes stayed shut through entire passages, and he gave few signs of having any human needs beyond meeting the requirements of the music. Not once, in seventy minutes, did he take a sip of water or look at the conductor or rub his throat. I had the odd thought that he might not have wanted to be onstage at all. Earlier, on a television show, I'd heard him say that listening to his own voice, even in the shower, made him "sick."

Mathis's career, though, remains surprisingly robust. When he performed on the A&E series "Live by Request" two years ago, his ratings were higher than those of Tony Bennett, Barry Manilow, James Taylor, and all the other headliners who had been on the program. And a few weeks ago the Songwriters' Hall of Fame gave him its Hitmaker award, an honor bestowed not on lame ducks but on active performers who are expected to keep making songwriters rich. Hal David, the organization's chairman and the lyricist for several Mathis hits, told me that Mathis received the award because his appeal was "generation-proof." Over the years, Mathis has recorded more than a hundred albums and more than a hundred singles, of which fifty or so have gone gold or platinum worldwide. Although there have been few major hits since 1965, his disks continue to sell well enough to keep him under contract at Columbia, the label that released his first album, "Johnny Mathis," in 1956, and his latest, "Mathis on Broadway," this spring.

"Johnny is a workhorse, a gladiator, with an iron constitution," Reigers said after the Pittsburgh concert. "He hasn't generally been freaking out about his voice, but this year, for the first time, we've had to cancel dates because he didn't feel confident that he could sing well. He was getting dry, and the notes were unreliable. I took him to a big voice doctor in New York and another one in Los Angeles, and both of them were surprised at the incredible condition of the cords in a man his age who's used them so much. Just before the 'Live by Request' broadcast, he got an injection of long-acting cortisone, which cleared up the problem, at least for now. The future? Who knows? Johnny says he wants to do another ten years. I think he could do at least another five."

Because Mathis has been "generation-proof" for so many years, it's easy to forget how big his first success was, and how quickly it came. He was born in Gilmer, Texas, in 1935, the fourth of Clem and Mildred Mathis's seven children. When he was six, the family moved to San Francisco. Although they were working class—his parents were, as he put it, "domestics," and one of his brothers collected tolls on the Golden Gate Bridge—Clem had once been a vaudevillian, and he saw to it that his children grew up with a love of singing. Mathis still recalls the nighttime arrival of a twenty-five-dollar upright piano, which had to be dismantled to fit through the door of their basement apartment, on Post Street. The first song he remembers singing was, appropriately, "My Blue Heaven," the 1927 standard in which domestic happiness is indelibly tinged with the inadvertent pun on "blue." Music was a blue heaven, but it was also the world, and it lured Mathis away from what he calls the "little nest" of his family. At thirteen, he was hanging out at the Blackhawk and other Bay Area jazz clubs, which featured musicians on the level of Erroll

Garner, Oscar Peterson, Dizzy Gillespie, and Dave Brubeck.

At the time, Mathis thought of himself less as a singer than as an athlete. In high school, he played basketball and ran hurdles; at San Francisco State College, where he enrolled in 1954, he set high-jump records. Though he was planning to become a teacher of English and physical education, he sometimes sang in the local clubs. A Sunday-afternoon jam session at the Blackhawk brought him to the attention of Helen Noga, one of the club's owners, who called George Avakian, the head of jazz for Columbia Records, and begged him to check out the young man. A few weeks later, at Ann Dee's 440 Club, a Tenderloin dive where the headliner was a female impersonator, Avakian heard Mathis sing "Tenderly." He immediately wired the home office: "Have found phenomenal 19-year-old boy who could go all the way. Send blank contracts." Mathis's first singles were recorded less than a year later, in 1956, a few days before he turned twenty-one. Two years later, the popularity of such songs as "It's Not for Me to Say" and "Chances Are" prompted the label to release a greatest-hits album. The first compilation of its kind, "Johnny's Greatest Hits" remained on the charts for four hundred and ninety consecutive weeks. By 1960—the year that America's teenagers named Mathis "Man of the Year" (ahead of Elvis) in a poll on singers—his reported annual royalties of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars had made him one of the highest-paid performers in the world. He was twenty-five.

We expect stars of this magnitude to crash and burn eventually, or, at least, get weepy on telethons. But Mathis just kept doing what he had done from the beginning: performing live (which he sometimes enjoys) and making records (which he doesn't). He has not, despite having logged some time with uppers and alcohol and Dr. Feelgood, been flayed in the press. Although he has seen himself referred to in such phrases as "a confirmed bachelor," even his personal life has largely been left alone. He is, in the best sense, an *uninteresting* star—a workhorse, as Reigers says. Having become successful just as the era of hyper-celebrity was dawning, Mathis has always seemed happiest operating just beneath its radar. It wasn't so much a career strategy as a personal necessity; at all costs, he wanted to avoid the appearance of pretentiousness. He has never forgotten how, in the early years, Noga and his handlers dressed him in tennis whites for photo shoots, even though he didn't play tennis. It was mortifying, he says. Now he runs his own business—he has no publicist or manager—and he declines most interviews.

Mathis, still drying his hair after a shower (he had just come from the golf course), greeted me at his rambling, wood-and-glass bungalow in the Hollywood Hills, where he has lived since 1964. Legend has it that the house was built by Howard Hughes for Jean Peters, and it seemed frozen in another era—a shagadelic era, to judge from the furniture. It had the atmosphere of a house that had not been visited for a long time—a sense that was somehow reinforced by the silent presence of a Korean housekeeper named Marcia, who padded around in the deep background. But, unlike the reclusive Norma Desmond, Mathis was disappointingly ungrand. When I asked if he'd show me around, he did so graciously but offhandedly—"There's the game room, there's the fish"—as if he were giving a tour not of his home but of an archive long since emptied, except for those exhibits that were, in any case, off limits. Although the place still retained the accoutrements of a swinging bachelor's pad—indoor pool, mirrored ceiling in the master bedroom—it seemed more like an abbey. Mathis showed me to the wine cellar, which, supposedly, had been the entrance to a secret tunnel connecting the house to Hughes's own residence nearby. "I emptied it out a few years ago when I gave up drinking," he explained. And what might once have been intended as a trysting spot—a mattress snuggled in a niche—was now filled with furry stuffed animals proffered by fans after concerts. Even the place's original selling point—a hundred-and-eighty-degree view of Los Angeles—had been all but obliterated some years back, when the neighbors replaced their house with a taller one. Mathis pointed toward the vista as if it were still there, and he looked freshly wounded. "How rude," he said. But then he brushed past it. "Here's where I really live," he said, ushering me into the kitchen, clearly a well-used room, with shelves of cookbooks, which he liked to read, he said, "for pleasure."

"I live alone, always have," he said as we settled down in a dark, mirrored sitting area. "I prefer it that way. I don't go out much. I read a lot, watch old movies, play golf incessantly—five days a week, five or six hours a day—and cook, of course. I have my friends, mostly the same ones I've had since high school. Beyond that, I just don't want to say. My private life is private; I would never talk about it. I was raised that way. When my mother and father were alive, that's how I felt, and even though they're gone now I would never say things that would have caused them pain. I loved my mother desperately; my father was my best friend. Together they were the best parents anyone could ever hope to have. I was desperately happy . . ." His voice trailed off.

That was as close to a personal revelation as Mathis was going to offer. It may have been as much as there *was* to offer. For six years, beginning in 1958, when he was twenty-three, he lived with Helen Noga and her husband, John, at their home in Beverly Hills. Noga was not about to let anything get in the way of her Pygmalion plan—not even Mathis's own mother, who, he told me, viewed Noga as something of a rival. "Helen loved me and would do anything for me, even though she went about it in a way that was a little too outgoing for my parents," Mathis said. "They were reticent types, like me. Helen was loud and aggressive, and she made us very uncomfortable. But she got the attention of everyone who had to hear me, so, you know, we went along." It is a matter of interpretation whether the bossy but fiercely devoted manager took advantage of an innocent young man or shrewdly negotiated his stardom. Mathis thinks both. In any case, she seems to have set up, or filled in, a pattern of domination and dependency that did not end even when, in 1964, he decided that he had to strike out on his own, and dissolved their business relationship. A succession of mother and father figures continued to manage his relations with the world, more or less benignly, for the next several decades.

Even now, Mathis seems not to have quite grown up. As we talked, he curled up on the sofa like a kid in pajamas, and from time to time covered himself with a throw pillow. His speaking voice, I noted, was actually quite low, a good octave below his singing voice. "I think of myself as a medium tenor," he told me. "My voice was always much lighter than a baritone, and not round like a baritone. I don't ever have to sing shrill to get the high notes. That's my specialty, of course, but I never would have learned how to do it if I hadn't had a woman teacher, Connie Cox, who knew how a woman sings and who gave me lessons, starting when I was thirteen. She taught me only pure technique, using mostly classical songs: how to open my throat without any irritation and make the air flow properly around my vocal cords. We had no money to pay her, so I did odd jobs in exchange for the lessons. I already knew what I didn't want to sound like: the boys. The boys sang only one way—flat out. Big baritone voices, not very subtle. Even the ones with high voices—Frankie Lymon, Johnny Ray, Frankie Avalon—couldn't sing subtly; they sang like men or they sang falsetto. The girls were warm and flexible and more interesting: June Christy, Chris Connor, Sarah, Ella, Lena, Dinah Washington. And I found that I could sing like them without falsetto. Who knows why?"

Although most of Mathis's early idols were black, his musical style did not arise from black genres. There is no street, no doo-wop or funk, and very little jazz in his singing. In the beginning, he tried to scat and improvise, but, however much rubato he used, his beat was always too transparent, his style too straightforward. It was Elvis, his exact contemporary, who succeeded by imitating "black" music. Mathis sang "white" music almost exclusively, and for largely white audiences—a decision that undoubtedly worked to his advantage when he was starting out but eventually marginalized him when "black" styles began to dominate pop music. It wasn't that his choice was the result of a business strategy; nor was it a statement about race. In fact, he seems blithely unconcerned about his racial origins. "My mother never knew her father, but we think he was Caucasian," he said. "Her mother was part American Indian. My father's family were African-American. So I've always known that there was

TAKES

RICHARD MERKIN

With each few steps the twittering sound rose in volume, the clicking of heels came faster, and more flowered bonnets pressed inward. Twiggy smiled brightly. She repeatedly said "Allaow!" She stopped to give autographs. The knot around her simultaneously tightened and grew larger. Teddy the Monk, exercising his role of bodyguard, went through motions of remonstration. "Orroit, orroit. Thetsit. Thenksverimuch. Brikeitup." Then everybody started scrambling. The trenchcoated cameraman, who had been getting a closeup of the autographing, ran ahead again, sweating, hugging the submachine-gun-like stock of his camera to one shoulder but keeping the long-lensed camera itself, with its handgrip trigger, pointed upward, out of harm's way—an attitude that, reinforced by the ammunition belt of batteries strapped low around his waist, gave him a peculiar banditlike air. By the time the party reached the northwest corner of Fifty-third Street, outside St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, the twittering sound had grown quite loud and the crowd around Twiggy was becoming really dense. In fact, I could no longer see either Twiggy or de Villeneuve; I placed them by the direction in which amateur cameras were being pointed. I could easily see the cameras, for they were being held at arm's length above the heads of the crowd, like offerings. By the time de Villeneuve and Twiggy crossed Fifty-third Street, the crowd had got out of control. The exclamations of "Twiggy!" had become screams and shouts, the throng was thrashing around wildly, and a policeman was vainly yelling "Break it up!"

—*Thomas Whiteside,*
A Reporter at Large, November 4, 1967

some racial mixture in me, but I've never been sure exactly what. Still, as long as you have some black you're black. When I first recorded, everyone thought I was white, because I didn't sound like whatever people think black people sound like. And then when Columbia started to put my face on album covers people still couldn't figure it out."

Mathis laughed. "And it never occurred to me to tell people about my racial mixture, because it wouldn't help my singing, and that's all I was interested in. I didn't want to be identified as one thing or another. I may be naïve, but I don't *think* I've ever been denied anything because of my race—except once, in Dallas, when I couldn't get a hotel. Helen had a hard time getting me into movies, but I didn't want to do movies anyway. What was I ever denied that mattered? I got the best songs from Broadway musicals, the best material from the best composers, the best producers at Columbia, most of whom were white. I think they thought of me as, well, grayish. To myself, I wasn't really anything except someone who sang. If that's 'passing,' I've spent a lot of my life passing, one way or another."

It's no accident that one of Mathis's favorite encores has been the Michel Legrand-Marilyn and Alan Bergman standard "How Do You Keep the Music Playing?" But when he sings it he's not asking a question about love, as the Bergmans intended, nor is he questioning his own vocal capabilities. With him, the song becomes a question about a lost era. The remarkable binding of polarities in his voice—male and female, black and white—represented the culmination of a process by which the popular song had been integrating disparate musical strands since 1900. Almost with the first drumbeat of the rock revolution, the Hollywood-Broadway-Tin Pan Alley nexus, out of which the great American songbook was created, dissolved. After 1964—the year that "Meet the Beatles!" was released—the music industry became fragmented, establishing new categories and micro-categories, increasingly fenced off from one another. Since then, a great deal of memorable music has emerged, but virtually none in the old idioms.

Meanwhile, of course, the audience that Mathis still commands has shrunk drastically. When he became a star, forty years ago, pop music's appeal was amorphous, and it was assumed that the entire range of record buyers would enjoy any song whose provenance fell between the jazz clubs and the symphony halls. In 1993, Columbia released a four-disk retrospective album entitled "The Music of Johnny Mathis," which leaped from big-band to folk to Ellington to Brazilian to rock to an almost operatic "Maria." Once, it would have been on the front tables, competing with, and complementing, everyone from Elvis to Ella. When I came across it last year in a record store, it was filed in that dreaded backwater called "Easy Listening."

Indeed, if Mathis wants to keep recording in today's youth-driven market he has very few choices, and the ones he does have sometimes end up seeming wan and denatured. His charming new album, "Mathis on Broadway," returns to the scene of many of his early successes, only to find the scene changed beyond recognition. The slim, nine-song collection purports to be a sampling of current Broadway standards, which is almost an oxymoron. Chestnuts like "On Broadway" and "Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries" pass muster only on a technicality: they were included in recent revues. Among the genuinely contemporary songs, one is a Disney confection; one is a duet with the ever-screechy Nell Carter; and the rest, save one, are pop-opera declamations from extravaganzas like "The Phantom of the Opera" and "Les Misérables," which make Mathis sound metallic. Only Sondheim's "Loving You," from "Passion"—an odd, inspired selection—is the kind of Broadway song that Mathis could always sell perfectly, with taste and simplicity.

In his live shows, however, Mathis has infinite choices. When I visited the offices, in Burbank, of Rojon Productions, which produces his concerts, and Jon Mat Records, which handles his recordings, I felt as though I were entering a time warp. In a room overlooking the

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A WALK IN THE UNCONSCIOUS

To walk the unconscious, you must pass
alligators lying on the verge
of Florida. Basking
like retread torn from a tire,
black-rubbery,

not yet warmed up enough to move—
what do you observe,
dead Dr. Freud?
Mud as black as your couch.
Vultures roost

on the observation tower, as if it were time
for another of the Divine Hours,
all fifty minutes' worth.
Their bald, red, sexual heads
do not embarrass them.

Their dress nunlike, long and dark,
they're waiting for death—
not theirs—
or a hot air current,
whichever comes first.

Something slithers into the lake on your left.
Something even larger bellows
from the underbrush,

warning you off—of what?
The smell of rot

is just old alligator nests, on which you walk.
A female, hearing faint cries,
dug up her clutch—
like Ping-Pong balls gone soft.
Moons torn open—

look! She'll bear mothering a year or so,
teaching her squirming young
that you take
whatever moves away.
Waiting for prey,

bird-watchers alone hold as still
as the working reptile.
Good Doctor,
what do you wish the patient?
Ordinary unhappiness,

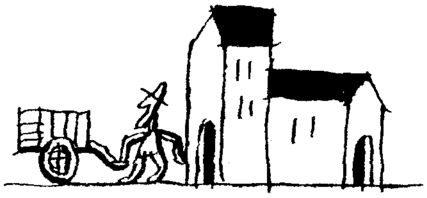
a lake drying up until the fish so concentrate
that the big wading birds,
busily feeding,
are undisturbed by the fact
you're only human.

—*Debora Greger*

old Warner Bros. lot and, beyond it, Forest Lawn Cemetery, were thousands of manila folios of songs on steel shelves, alphabetized, from "Ace in the Hole" to "You've Got a Friend" and including four different arrangements of "Misty" and seven of "Chances Are." The names of the arrangers alone brought back a lost era: Mancini, Riddle, Glenn Osser, Allyn Ferguson, Don Costa. A calendar of concert dates for the next several years showed fewer and fewer each month. The impression of a diminishing enterprise was confirmed when I learned that, soon after my visit, the offices were moved to smaller quarters.

"I remember when we did forty-eight shows in six weeks, or up to twelve shows a week in Europe," Gil Reigers had told me in Pittsburgh. "Over a hundred a year as recently as 1993. Now we're down to forty-five." Attracting audiences is not a problem; individually, the shows are as profitable as ever, and sometimes even more so. But cutting back the number of outings he'll do per month has obliged Mathis to raise ticket prices to cover the company's expenses. The problem stems from the fact that a classic Johnny Mathis show requires at least twenty-four backup musicians and is therefore costly to produce. "We've been asked to do smaller, more self-contained gigs," Reigers said. "But John's been smart, sticking it out with his big arrangements. It's what makes him *him*. Now, just about no one can afford it but John. Soon, it's gonna be over and people won't get to hear this stuff anymore. He'll have been the last."

In Studio A at the headquarters of Capitol Records, in Hollywood, Mathis met not long ago with the singer Monica Mancini to lay down the vocal track of a song entitled "Dreamsville." The music was by Monica's father, Henry Mancini, and Mathis had agreed to perform the duet as a tribute to the late composer. Henry Mancini not only wrote several of Mathis's biggest hits but was also one of his father figures. Monica told me that "adoration" was not too strong a word for what the two men felt for each other. This didn't mean that Mathis was happy about being in the recording studio. The previous day, he and Monica had worked out a routine with the arranger, but later, when Mathis listened to the demo tape, he found that the orchestra was playing in a much higher key than the one he'd rehearsed in. The new key required him to float a long, soft, high C-sharp, which would have been a stretch even when he was twenty. "I freaked," he told me. But, knowing that it was too late to re-record the orchestra, he decided that he wasn't going to worry; he would just open his mouth and sing the highest sound that came out.



Since the session was being videotaped for a PBS special, Mathis arrived early for makeup. Then he and Mancini got down to rehearsing the song—a fluty pop arrangement of a pretty little reverie. Over several hours, many suggestions were tossed out: "Sing harmony here"; "No, unison"; "No, you go up an octave"; "No, the first time up and the second time down." Mathis was never less than accommodating, and everyone in the sound booth made admiring comments about his professionalism and his stamina.

Still, he was having trouble in his upper register—"Ah, the sad last bastion of a note," he said, after the hoped-for C-sharp wandered around for a while and then expired. During a break, he smiled ruefully and said, "I never liked recording. Less so now than ever. For the first ten years of my career, you had about one and a half hours to put down a song. An album—twelve songs—took three days to make. And it was in the stores a week later. You had to be spontaneous and sing all the way through, because you couldn't splice any fixes. Now the process has become so complicated that it's not fun anymore. It's like trying to make love for five hours. But who am I to say it's not progress?"

I found out later that he had lasted for six hours. And nailed the C-sharp. ◆

FICTION

THE MALE GAZE

BY LUCINDA ROSENFELD

THE MOST IMPORTANT ARTIST OF THE POST-SECOND WORLD WAR PERIOD

Sometimes she felt like hot shit, sometimes just like shit. It changed by the hour, or even by the minute. City life had that effect on Phoebe: spontaneous self-aggrandizement degenerated into self-disgust at the smallest provocation. The insistent bass line of a teen-ager's boom box, the sickly sweet smell of chicken wings on the subway, the sight of other women taller and thinner and more gorgeous than she would ever be could render the stories that she told herself about herself pure fiction. So it was that while she rode the elevator up to a party that Susan Kenny was throwing at her Pearl Street apartment a fleeting glance at her hair (too flat!) and her face (too puffy!) in the polished-copper ceiling, the reflective surface of which was as unforgiving as a fluorescent-lit mirror in a public rest room, left Phoebe suddenly dejected and wondering if she ought to turn back.

But she hated to miss things. And since she'd come all this way, invested all that time in separating her eyelashes, styling her hair, moisturizing her cheeks, and lining her lips, she opened the door. A barrage of static heat, exaggerated laughter, and stale smells made her feel daunted all over again. She'd never seen so many people packed into such a small space. She didn't recognize a single one. She elbowed her way through the crowd in search of the hostess.

She finally found Susan Kenny sitting cross-legged on the kitchen counter nursing a Corona.

"Susan!" Phoebe squealed in relief. (That she could perform giddy exuberance even at her most defeated—Phoebe had always taken this quality of hers for granted.)

"Phoebe!" Susan chimed, matching Phoebe's exultant tone as she descended from her perch and enveloped Phoebe in an overblown bear hug—as if they actually liked each other, as if they hadn't seen each other in ten years when the truth was more like a year. "Ohmygod you look *so* great!"

"Thanks. So do you," Phoebe lied. In fact, she'd never seen Susan look worse. Her skin was blotchy. It was pretty obvious she'd gained weight. Susan, Phoebe thought with a combination of disdain and jealousy, but mostly just disdain, was one of those girls for whom mediocrity was its own reward.

"It's the craziest thing," Susan said, leaning into Phoebe's ear with her hot beer breath. "There are all these totally gorgeous guys here!"

"That's so crazy!" Phoebe said, distracted. She'd already spotted her gorgeous guy, standing over by a potted ficus. He was a tallish thing with streaks of platinum in his spiky brown hair, and he was wearing a brown suède fringed jacket and black leather pants. She had a feeling he was looking at her, too. She wasn't expecting him to admit it. But there he was, not three minutes later, standing next to her, saying, "I've been checking you out," one elbow leaned up against an Ikea bookcase filled with Susan's college psychology textbooks.

"Oh, really?" Phoebe said.

"Yeah, really," the gorgeous guy said and then smiled. He lifted a plastic cup to his lips. "You're very fuckable," he told her before he bent his head back and chugged.

Of all the affronts! But Phoebe could play this game, too. Which is why she asked him, "Do you really mean it?" all big eyes and faux grateful.

Except she was. That was the pathetic part. She couldn't help herself. When cocky assholes expressed interest in her, she felt alive. When nice guys hit on her, she had trouble caring. This was because men had become a living metaphor for her aspirations, for her quest for approval (and, invariably, for her history of disappointment). It had started in the fifth grade with Roger (Stinky) Mancuso, who mysteriously left town a week after their first kiss; in high school, it was Jason Barry Gold, the captain of the varsity lacrosse team, who informed Phoebe that she was "more of a challenge" than the other girls in her class because she was a virgin; then there were Spitty Clark, a frat boy and possible date rapist who lost his lunch in the middle of her first attempt to lose that virginity, and Humphrey Fung, a kilt-wearing anarchist who dumped her for an animal-rights activist, and, finally, Bruce Bledstone, a married professor of critical theory, who assured Phoebe, during one of several breakups, that though he couldn't express deeper feelings for her, she had "permanently eroticized the topography of his bedroom." It was little wonder that, by the time Phoebe arrived in New York with a B.A. in feminist film theory, she felt that sex was all she really had to offer.

"I mean it," he said. Then he extended an arm and introduced himself as Pablo Miles.

"Starla Chambers," she said, returning the favor—because it sounded like the kind of name that belonged to the kind of girl he'd want to know and she wanted to be.

Whereupon Pablo Miles got down on one knee, pressed his lips to the back of her hand, then his tongue.

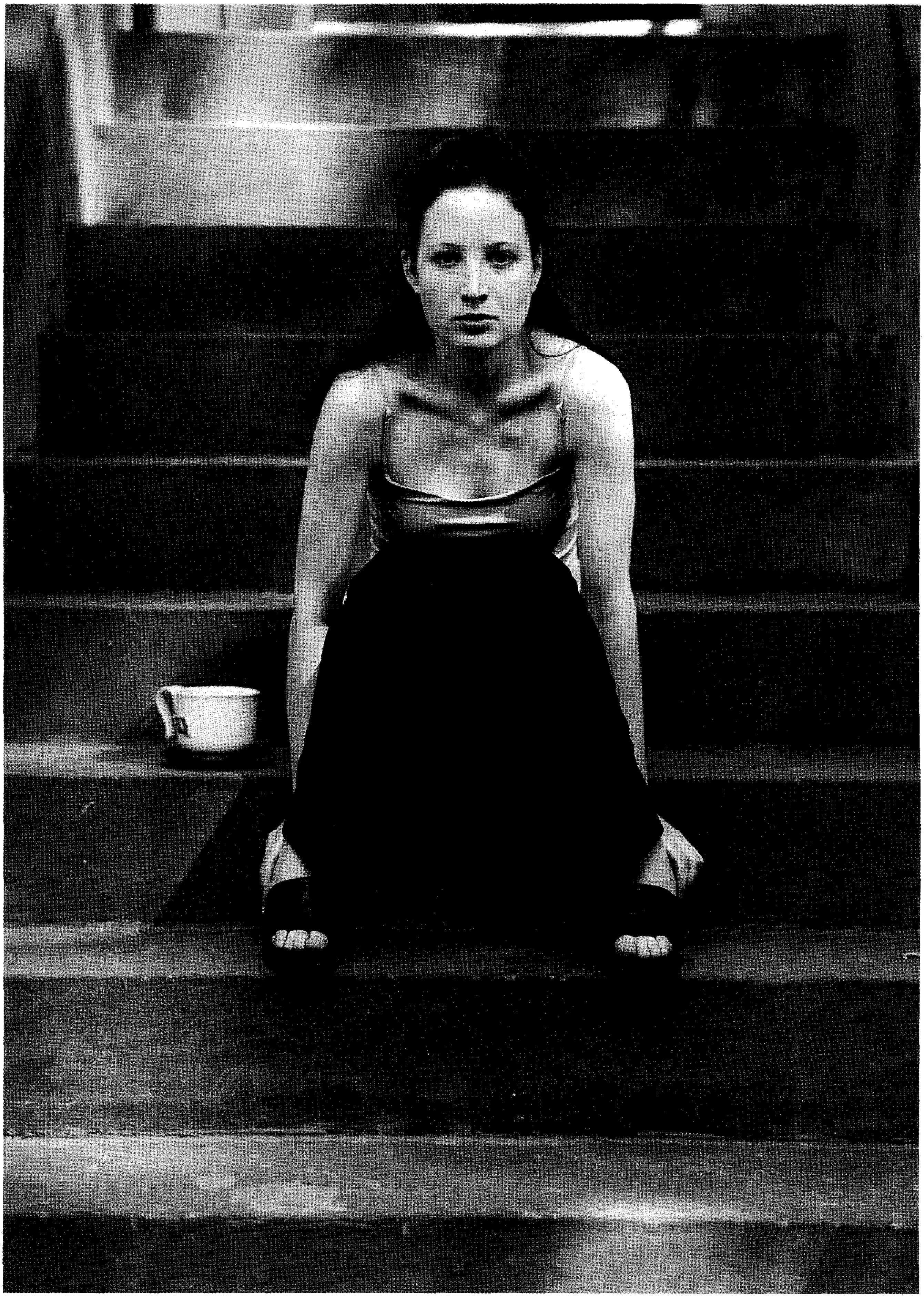
"Gross!" She jerked her hand out of his grasp.

"You know you like it," he told her.

"I don't just like it, I need it," Phoebe corrected him.

"Nympho."

"Letch."



Lucinda Rosenfeld outside her apartment in Brooklyn, New York. Photograph by Andrea Artz.

"I never said I wasn't."

She rolled her eyes. She lit a cigarette. She wasn't having a bad time.

Their first date was more like an appointment—to screw. Pablo Miles called her the very next morning. He arrived at her apartment at noon. They went to bed at one. But first he pushed her up against the door of her closet. "You have a really hot body," he told her.

"So do you," she was going to tell him, then changed her mind, thinking it sounded too aggressive. And because, despite the nympho jokes, he was the conqueror and she was the conquest. That was the arrangement.

"Thank you," she said instead, and smiled demurely.

Whereupon Pablo Miles reached under her skirt. In response, Phoebe made little breathy noises intended to imply her helplessness in the face of overwhelming desire. She didn't mean most of them. Maybe not any of them. Not because it didn't feel good. It felt plenty good. But it felt insignificant. Something like pissing. She was finding that sex could be like that—satisfying, but in only the most quotidian of ways. In fact, she could come at will. In ten seconds flat. With the right amount of pressure applied to the right places. At the same time, she was never entirely convinced that she'd come. Her orgasms frequently seemed too calculated to be believed.

It was like that with Pablo Miles.

After which point he asked her, "Do you want me to fuck you now?"

She told him, "O.K."

Because it seemed like a nice thing to do—to let him fuck her after he'd brought her, if not to orgasm, then to something that loosely approximated one. And then he did. And she enjoyed it insofar as she enjoyed watching Pablo Miles enjoy himself. So she came again. Or, at least, she made noises to imply that she had. Because Pablo Miles was bound to be both flattered and impressed.

Afterward, he said, "A lot of girls can't come during intercourse."

To which Phoebe replied, "I'm not like other girls. I'm more like a man."

"You're like a man's fantasy," he told her.

She didn't argue with the assessment.

They showered. They dressed. They moseyed on over to some adorable little café with an Italian surname, on MacDougal Street, where they sat at a wrought-iron table out front, slurping the froth off their cappuccinos. They were both feeling high on themselves—the way people sometimes do after sex that leads to orgasm in a timely fashion. Pablo told Phoebe that he was destined to be recognized as the most important American artist of the post-Second World War period. In the meantime, he was getting his M.F.A. at Hunter. Phoebe told Pablo that she intended to make groundbreaking documentaries on the "male gaze." In the meantime, she was working as a two-hundred-dollar-a-week production assistant for an all-women documentary collective, currently shooting "Home Is Where the Husband Is," a cinéma-vérité exploration of Filipino mail-order brides living in Queens.

Later, the talk turned to all the other guys/girls who were currently hot for the two of them. "There's this total dweeb named Robert who's always calling me, and I feel bad because he's really nice, but I'm totally not interested," Phoebe told Pablo.

"Believe me, I know what that's like," Pablo told Phoebe. "There's this girl at Hunter who's, like, obsessed with me. She's, like, this big fat girl. Ass like a truck. She's always writing me these love letters. Maybe I should fuck her. You know, just to be nice." (Smile, smile.)

"You're so bad." (Phoebe shaking her head; Pablo loving it; Phoebe loving it, too. What was more ego-enhancing than making dumb jokes at the expense of ugly women? Phoebe could never decide whom she hated more—other people or herself.)

Their second date was more of a date. They met for a late dinner at Rose of India on East Sixth Street, where they split an order of *chana saag* and talked about the past. "I hated guys like you in high school," Phoebe felt compelled to inform Pablo.

"How do you know what I was like in high school?" Pablo asked.

"I can just tell," she told him. "You probably wouldn't even have talked to me in high school."

"Were you hot?"

"Not particularly," she admitted.

"Then I probably wouldn't have talked to you," he agreed.

"See, I told you," she said, hating him just a little.

"Here they come: Detox and Botox."

"But you're hot now," he said. "So what does it matter?"

She liked him again. She was easy to appease. She was even more eager to please. The only reason she went to the midnight showing of "Wings of Desire" at the Angelika Film Center was that Pablo wanted to. She dozed off halfway through. Pablo nudged her during the credits. "Come on, wake up," he whispered. "Unless you want me to fuck you while you're asleep."

"Rapist," she muttered under her breath.

"Baby, I'm a rape fantasy," he muttered back.

"I thought Alekan's use of chiaroscuro was pure genius," he volunteered in the taxi back to his Brooklyn digs—half a floor of an old turpentine factory that he shared with four other guys.

"Alex who?" she asked.

"Forget it," he said, scowling.

"No, why?"

"I thought you said you worked in film."

"I do."

"Alekan is only, like, the greatest cinematographer who ever lived."

"Well, I didn't know that!"

"Well, now you do."

His canvases hung from the makeshift walls of his bedroom. They were big and busy, with splattered oil paint half obscuring recognizable cartoon characters and free-floating female body parts. There was a quality to all of them that was, she had to admit, oppressively familiar. Phoebe was disappointed. She'd been thinking that Pablo Miles might be a great innovator for our times. Despondent, she stretched out on his futon and closed her eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked, climbing onto the mattress next to her.

"Nothing," she answered.

"Are you horny?"

"Maybe."

"Do you want me to fuck you?"

Was it possible that she didn't know if she did? Phoebe often found herself unable to differentiate between what she wanted and what he wanted, whoever *he* happened to be at the time.

"I'll take that to mean yes," Pablo said, reaching for her zipper.

The next morning, over a portion of Stouffer's French Bread Pizza and some strawberry-flavored Carnation Instant Breakfast, he said, "I've got to be careful. I could get used to this life."

"I know what you mean," Phoebe said, jubilant at the thought that he might be growing attached to her. That she wasn't necessarily growing attached to him was beside the point. He was so handsome, and a painter. He'd even gone to Princeton. It was an impressive résumé, a romantic résumé.

She felt like hot shit just thinking about it.

"I want to go away with you," he told her on the phone the following day. "My family has a house near Killington. Nothing fancy. Just an old A-frame at the base of the mountain. Let's go up Friday morning. Just you and me. What do you say?"

The idea of going away with Pablo Miles worried Phoebe. After all, they'd met only a week before. And what if they ran out of things to talk about up there in the country with no distractions—no downtown Manhattan or bohemian Brooklyn to confuse with a context? She thought back to the only trip she'd taken with Humphrey the anarchist, a relationship-ending sojourn on an island off the coast of Maine. He'd spent the entire weekend lying on a flotation device off the dock, reading Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex"—and ignoring Phoebe.

"We hardly know each other," she said.

"So?"

"It seems kind of soon."

"I want to fuck you in a sleeping bag."

The image excited her. Or maybe it was the sound of the word "fuck" on Pablo Miles's lips. On his lips, that word sounded like an imperative.

"The thing is, I have a shoot on Friday," Phoebe told him. "I mean, it's not my shoot . . ." Because she was just the grunt who unpacked the catered lunch, who separated the clear plastic wrap from the basket of premade sandwiches. "Let me see if I can get out of it."

And she did. She started packing the night before. All her cute clothes. The kind of clothes *Mademoiselle* suggested you pack for a romantic getaway. Puffy socks to pad around the fire in. An oversized chenille sweater with extra-long sleeves to hide your hands in when

MAKING CHOICES

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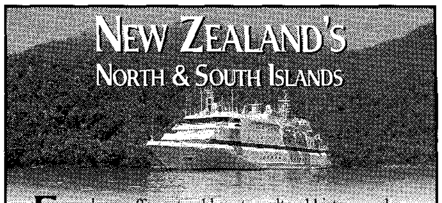

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you're feeling coy. She was ready to go at ten. At quarter past, she looked at her watch. At half past, the phone rang. It was Pablo calling from the street. "Listen, Starla, I broke down on the Brooklyn Bridge," he shouted over honking horns and emergency-vehicle sirens.

"That's terrible!" Phoebe shouted back.

"Yeah, the radiator overheated or something. I'm gonna take Betty to the garage. I'll call you when I get home."

But he didn't. He didn't call the next day, either. And by that point it was pretty clear that he wasn't going to.

Phoebe was mostly just relieved. She didn't know how much longer she could have continued the experiment. In the end, that's all Pablo Miles was to her—a test case to see whom she could fool, and for how long, into thinking that she was someone she wasn't. If it ended now as opposed to later, he would never learn how neurotic and boring and essentially talentless she really was, and be forced to leave, disappointing them both. That was the problem with cocky assholes. In the end, they were good only for sex. In the end, you couldn't wait to get away, to get back to yourself—even if that self was a fraud, or a freak, or a fool.

She ran into Pablo Miles in front of Tower Video a year later.

"Pablo Miles." She said his name out loud just to be sure it was him.

He didn't respond immediately. Then he turned around with a start and said, "If it isn't Starla Chambers!"

"That's me," she said.

"I remember you." He smiled congenially. "You had a really cute ass." He craned his neck around her backside. "You still do."

Phoebe rolled her eyes, shook her head. "You always were disgusting," she said, hating herself for her vanity and for her inability to hold grudges. And for saying the very thing that Pablo Miles wanted to hear.

That was clear from his answer. "It's true." He grinned lubriciously. "I've always been a sexist pig."

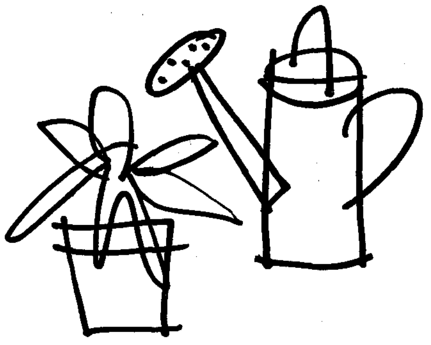
Months later, Phoebe found out that Pablo Miles's real name was Peter Mandelbaum. She wondered then if he'd been feeling the same things she'd felt. But it was too late. By then he was just another name in her address book, whose number she hadn't dialled in a long time, probably never would again.

PHOEBE FINE'S SHORT-LIVED EXPERIMENT WITH PROMISCUITY

This is what she'd learned about the male gaze: to walk into a crowded room and have twenty sets of eyes defer to your silver-sequinned purse—that was some kind of exquisite power. ("Thank you. . . . Just a lipstick and a twenty and it looks like someone's business card. . . . I wonder whose it is. . . . I can't imagine how it got there. . . . Debevoise what? . . . I would have made a terrible lawyer. . . . I've always hated conflict. . . . I've never been good at midtown. . . . I remind you of who? . . . Excuse me one second. . . . Sorry about that. . . . You were saying?")

It was the act that followed that finally irked her—the way it always led down the same path, to the same ineluctable conclusion, prompted by the same stiff drinks, the same loaded glances, the same false promises, the same pornographic drivel, the same leading questions. The same "Do you want me to fuck you?" And "I wanna fuck you so badly right now." And "You know you want me to fuck you." And "What are the chances you're gonna let me fuck you tonight?" And "I'm so fucking attracted to you." And "You have such a great body." And "You have such great tits." And "You have such a great ass." And "Did anyone ever tell you that you look like that actress? . . . that model? . . . that pickaxe murderer on death row?"

And "I really love making love to you." And "I really love making love with you." And "Lemme pull the shades." And "Lemme lock the door." And "Your hands are so cold." And "You're so incredibly hot." And "D'you



wanna touch it? . . . lick it? . . . kiss it? . . . suck it?" And "Can I put it in?" And "I promise I'll be careful." And "I promise I'll pull out." And "I'm clean." And "I'm tested." And "I'm sorry." And "It's not you." And "It's me." And "It's nothing." And "It's just that . . . " And "I guess I'm a little nervous." And "Will you kiss it again?" And "Come here." And "Don't move." And "You're so wet . . . so tight . . . so unbelievably beautiful."

And "I can't believe you let me stick my finger up your asshole in the back of the cab on our very first date." And "You're such a little whore." And "You're such a little prude." And "Can you lift up a little?" And "Can you scoot down a bit?" And "Can you move up an inch?" And "Will you say my name?" And "Will you say it again?" And "You can't get enough." And "You fuck like a man." And "Can we do it doggie?" And "Have you ever been fucked by two guys at once?"

And "Use me." And "Abuse me." And "That's right." And "That's perfect." And "Wait." And "Forget I ever mentioned it." And "Baby, come here." And "Baby, don't be upset with me." And "I'm such a pig." And "I'm such a dick—aren't I?" And "Lemme touch you." And "Does that feel good?" And "Does this feel good?" And "Did you come?" And "Can I come now?" And "I promise I'll be quick." And "Can I come inside you?" And "Can I come on your face?" And "Baby, I'm coming." And "Do you want to come again?"

And "That was really amazing." And "That was pretty intense." And "Lemme get a towel." And "Has anyone seen my cigarettes?" And "Where'd you say you were from?" And "Oh yeah?" And "That's cool." And "My dad moved out when I was six . . . eight . . . ten . . . twelve." And "My mom remarried when I was seven . . . nine . . . eleven . . . thirteen." And "I didn't have a lot of friends." And "I watched a lot of TV." And "I smoked a lot of pot." And "I jerked off, like, eleven times a day." And "Hey." And "Come here." And "Look at me." And "Phoebe." And "Baby." And "Hey, you O.K.?"

Oh, she was O.K., just tired, tired of being the one they wanted, the one they couldn't live without, the one they found themselves reaching out an arm for as she teetered from crisis to crisis only to collapse onto their beds at the end of the day, a tortured sylph in black lace. Except she never really was. And they never really did. Or maybe they did for one night. The next night was another matter.

PHOEBE FINE'S SHORT-LIVED EXPERIMENT WITH CELIBACY

The spots: they took Phoebe by surprise—ambushed her one night while she slept. She woke under siege, her face stippled like an Impressionist painting. The bumps were everywhere. And the more she tried to defend herself against their advances the angrier they became. Until that old joke from junior high school—"Your epidermis is showing"—had a certain truth to it. She felt unfit for public viewing. She walked with her eyes on the pavement. She stopped looking at men. Men stopped looking at her. She'd never been so lonely. She wondered if she'd ever find love again. Or were those bumps merely an excuse to be alone—for once?

For Phoebe, even the idea of documentary film had come to seem intrusive. She took a job at the Third World Knowledge Initiative, a nonprofit research foundation, where she coördinated a fellowship program for African agriculturists. Which is to say, she purchased plane tickets and wired money and sent official-sounding letters to a bunch of guys she'd never met, with funny names like Elvis Ngale Ngale. It wasn't always easy. But the job didn't pay badly, and it gave Phoebe a place to lose herself.

And sometimes it was enough just to be away from clueless, incorrigible Crystal, Phoebe's aspiring-actress apartment mate, who thought she was really gorgeous because all these guys were in love with her at the same time. Phoebe had found her through the classifieds. Objectively speaking, she wasn't a bad apartment mate. She was neat. She cleaned her dishes. She kept her hair off the soap. But she'd waltz into Phoebe's glorified broom closet without knocking and sigh and simper and flip her hair and sigh some more before declaring, "I just don't know what to do. I mean, I like both of them.

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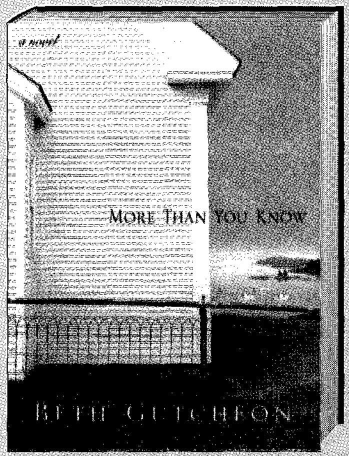

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I mean, who do you think is cuter—Jeff or Steve?" as if she'd been handed the job of dividing up Europe when she was really only deciding whom to fuck.

Phoebe tried to be nice. She said, "Who cares who *I* think is cuter, Crystal? Who do *you* think is cuter?"

"I mean, they're both really cute!" Crystal groaned. "That's the problem."

"I'm sure you'll figure it out." Phoebe smiled benevolently, even though she was hating Crystal inside.

Phoebe listened to Puccini and wrote bad poetry. She ate dry cereal for dinner and read dry magazines on current events. She went back to sleeping with her stuffed basset hound, Walter, whom she'd had since she was eight.

She went on a few first dates.

There was the dermatologist who offered her dermabrasion free of charge.

There was Jacob the Earnest Young Attorney, who spent all of dinner recounting the "fascinating" stories he'd read in that morning's *Times:* "According to an article I read this morning on A13, the Bulgarian Mafia is so powerful they now control the country's waterworks. However, I read another article in last Sunday's Week in Review suggesting that waterworks were just the half of it."

There was Larry the Gourmet-Pasta Distributor, who, halfway through his fusilli, laid down his fork, coughed performatively, and inquired, with obvious irritation, "Sooooooo—what's with this, like, ennui thing you're sportin'?"

Then there was Carlos the Taxi-Driver Who Really Wanted to Direct. It was true that English was his second language, and that he'd lived in this country for only three years. But the fact that he didn't use contractions drove Phoebe insane. He said, "I will come over now," instead of "I'll come over now," and then he did. And it wasn't fun at all.

When he called a few days later to see about a second date, Phoebe told him, "I am really sorry, Carlos, but I just do not think we are a match."

"I am very disappointed," Carlos replied.

"I do not know what to say."

"Do not say anything," he said. "I will hang up now."

And he did. And that was that.

SABA

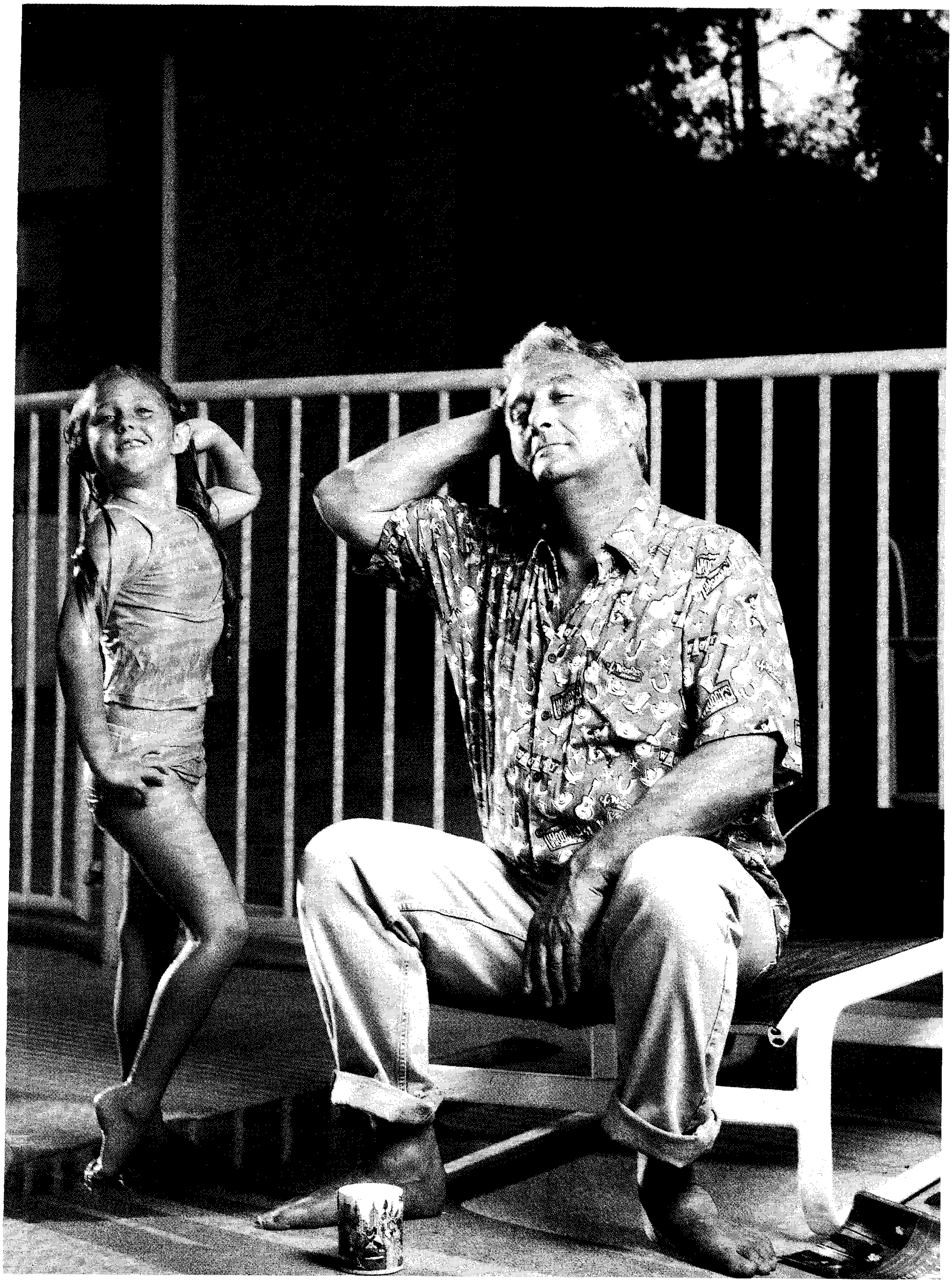
SHOWCASE BY
MARTIN SCHOELLER

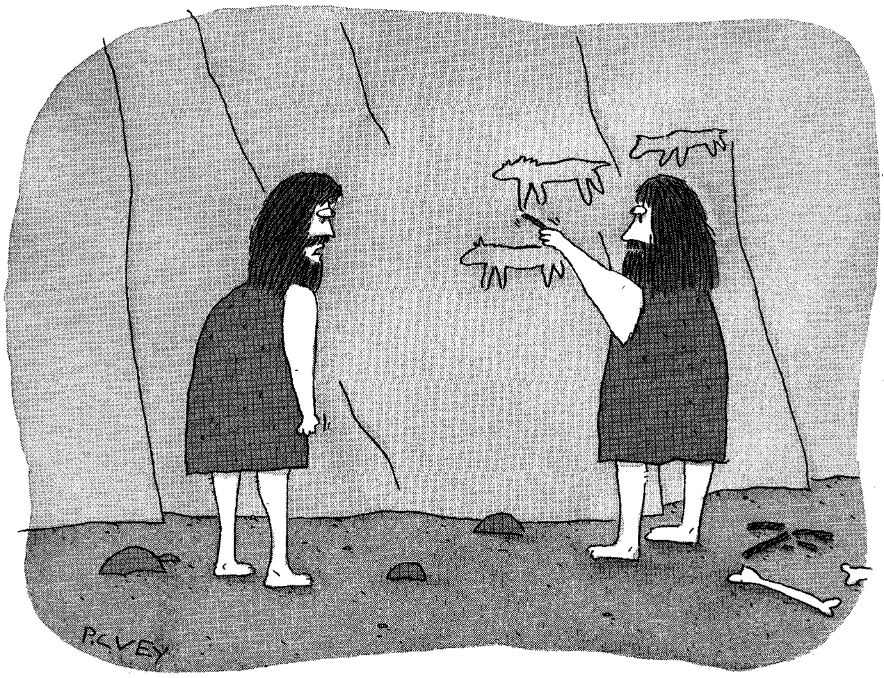
NEWMAN'S OWN

How anyone ever confused Randy Newman with a rock star is something of a mystery. True, he likes to thump out rolling New Orleans piano lines reminiscent of Fats Domino's. And his voice has a gruffly engaging quality that transcends its technical limits. But his soul is supremely ironic and self-deprecating—two qualities that have never figured prominently in the narcissistic arsenal of rock and roll. In 1971, even as the Rolling Stones were issuing well-lubricated reports from free love's front lines, Newman was recording a waltz on the theme of sexual frustration, titled "Maybe I'm Doing It Wrong." ("It just don't move me the way that it should / Maybe I'm doing it wrong.") Since then, he has become one of Hollywood's premier film composers and has continued to release pop records that revel in the delusions and idiocies of his fellowmen. Never one to shrink from a disagreeable narrator, Newman has given voice to drunks ("Marie"), bigots ("Short People"), racists ("Rednecks"), and even slave traders ("Sail Away").

Recently, Newman, with co-writers Michael Roth and Jerry Patch, has taken his own measure with a musical called "The Education of Randy Newman." The show, which is playing at the South Coast Repertory Theatre, in Costa Mesa, California, uses more than forty Newman songs to portray a man reviewing his life at the century's close. (The title echoes the memoir of another mordant turn-of-the-century observer, Henry Adams.) Newman, who is a determined homebody (he is pictured here with his two youngest children, Patrick and Alice, by their pool in Los Angeles), is absent from the stage. But he professes himself "delighted" with the results, saying, "It's good to hear some legit voices on the songs."

—*Giles Smith*





"My doctor says you should be drawing more fruits and vegetables."

• •

It wasn't so bad being alone, except it got kind of lonely after a while.

THE GREAT DATE

She felt like a better version of herself that night, the night of her first date with Neil Shmertz, her hair swinging, her skin clear, her lips red, her legs long and sheathed in black, her conscience clear, her future if not bright then at least unknown. And the way she felt about herself affected the way she looked at Neil Shmertz, whom, in all honesty, she'd found only vaguely attractive when she first met him—through a friend of a friend, at a mutual friend's party—but who, it now seemed to her, cut a comely figure in a black three-button suit, a rust-colored, open-collared button-down, and black buckle booties. He was trim and taller than she. And his sideburns were fashionably long, his fingernails clean, his dark hair, if slightly on the natty side, then neatly cropped, at least.

He looked comfortable in his own skin—at thirty, less like a boy than like a grown man. And there was an ease in the way he kissed her hello on the cheek, helped her with her coat. He smelled clean. He looked competent, too. As if he'd know what to do in a crisis—in a fire, or a robbery, or an elevator that got stuck. Even more impressive, he seemed to know the maître d', who shook his hand before he showed them to their table and pushed it aside so that Phoebe could maneuver her way into the banquette.

"It's nice to see you." That was the first thing out of Neil Shmertz's mouth.

And while it wasn't the most inspired line ever uttered, the way he said it—leaning forward slightly in his chair, his eyes focussed, the corners of his mouth lifted in a half smile—made her think he meant it.

"It's nice to see you, too," Phoebe said. At which point a waiter appeared to take their drink order. "I'll have a glass of white wine," she told the guy.

"By the glass, we have a California Chardonnay, a Pinot Grigio, and a Gewürztraminer from Alsace," he said.

"I'll have the Gewürztraminer." Phoebe giggled at her garbled pronunciation.

"And a glass of Merlot for me," Neil said.

That's how it started.

It continued with a mixed-field-greens salad for her and a Cobb salad for him and thirty-five minutes of innocuous chitchat regarding the irritations of their respective workdays, the beleaguered state of Phoebe's cuticles, and the intricate web of people and places that had led to their meeting one balmy evening in late August.

Between bites of the main course—the Chilean sea bass for her, the filet mignon for him—Neil told Phoebe a little about himself. About how he'd grown up "your basic nerd" in a wealthy suburb of Chicago, spending most of his time getting high and watching "Saturday Night Live" reruns. He went to Brandeis, then moved to San Francisco, and then to New York. He currently made his home in a rent-stabilized one-bedroom in Chelsea. He developed CD-ROMs for a startup called Atlas Digital. On weekends he played squash, watched movies, and rode his bike. He hated himself for crying at the end of "Forrest Gump." He preferred imported to domestic beers. He went to therapy once a week. He was closer to his mother than to his father. In fact, his ex-girlfriend, Diane, used to tease him about how often he spoke to his mother on the phone—just about every day.

Then their plates were cleared, their drinks replenished. At which point, Neil turned to Phoebe and said, "What about you?"

So she told him her life story, the five-minute version she'd rattled off so many times before that it had begun to sound more like a standup routine at a third-rate comedy club than like the life she remembered having lived. In this version, she was a happy-go-lucky sexpot/eccentric/drama queen/professional neurotic with a charming fragile streak. She told Neil, "My Marxist phase gave way to my Barbarella phase. I thought I was really postmodern and I wore really short skirts made out of fake fur and I was in outer space all the time thanks to this anti-anxiety medication I was taking so that I wouldn't freak out if my chicken was touching my rice. Plus, I was going out with this married man, and worried his wife would find out. . . ." Lies and half-truths, all of it.

But what did Neil Shmertz know? He seemed to find everything that came out of Phoebe's mouth fascinating, provocative, worrisome, surprising—just this side of insane. And he shook his head at the right moments, expressed concern where concern needed to be expressed.

Then dessert arrived—a flourless chocolate-mousse cake to split. Whereupon Phoebe took a final drag on her cigarette and raised her mostly empty glass. She felt suddenly, exuberantly, blitzed. "Bon appetit," she mouthed in the pinched, Anglican clip of Julia Child.

"To our date," Neil said, clinking his glass against her own.

"To our dinner," Phoebe added.

"To our plates," Neil continued.

It went on like that, with each toast progressively more absurd, until they were toasting the tablecloth, the Dalai Lama, Manfred Mann's Earth Band. It was the Gewürztraminer. It was also Neil Shmertz, who made her feel special but also normal—wonderfully, tantalizingly normal.

"Thank you for having dinner with me," he told her.

"Anytime."

"Phoebe."

"What?"

"You're amazing."

It was pretty corny. It was nice to hear. So much so that when Neil Shmertz reached for her hand, Phoebe gave it to him gladly. And while he stroked the back of it, his eyes dissolving into hers, she wondered if she might spend the rest of her life with this man—not so much because she'd fallen in love but because she was tired of not being in love. And he was such a gentleman. He was even Jewish.

He paid the check.

And then he walked her to Canal Street, where he put her in a cab, though not before he'd kissed her on the lips in front of a discount electronics emporium, Mack trucks roaring by them with mud-flap girls swinging perilously behind their eighteen wheels. And while it wasn't, maybe, the most inspired kiss Phoebe had ever experienced, it was a good kiss, a solid kiss, a solicitous kiss. And that meant something to her.

It meant he'd want to see her again.

She wanted to see him, too.

In fact, they saw each other the very next night—and the next night after that. By then, they were a couple, catching up on each other's days, dropping already familiar names, trading private jokes born of earlier incidents in their short dating career. For Phoebe, the transition was as natural as it was sudden. Indeed, Neil Shmertz seemed to her like the logical next step—a step in the direction of maturity. It wasn't merely that he always had a chilled bottle of Pinot Grigio waiting in the refrigerator and showed up at the hour that he said he was going to show up at and put to rest any questions in her family regarding her ability to grow up and lead a "normal life." He showed an interest in her future, where others had been oblivious.

After four months of dating, Phoebe and Neil moved into the second floor of a Victorian brownstone in the Boerum Hill section of Brooklyn. It was pleasant like the suburbs, but it was urban by virtue of the sprawl that surrounded it—the fried-chicken joints and public-housing projects and Islamic education centers. Never mind the Brooklyn House of Detention. And it was for this reason that Phoebe could imagine that she and Neil, far from being mimickers of the bourgeois tropisms of their parents' generation, were one of those haute-bohemian couples who lounged around their retro-modern flats in androgynous Calvin Klein underwear, snacking on seaweed while debating the relative merits of the latest Don DeLillo novel—when they weren't uninstalling software on their his-and-hers laptops, deconstructing Japanimation, or preparing late-night dinners for their ten best friends, all of whom were similarly attractive, ironic, and technologically adroit.

But the reality was something different; the reality was that there were no dinner parties—only dinner, typically taken out from You Bet You Want Szechwan, only to be taken in on Neil's pilled futon couch, the two of them in matching terry-cloth bathrobes, a romantic comedy starring Meg Ryan playing on the tube.

Moreover, the less effort they made to connect with the outside world, the more inseparable they became. One pissed while the other brushed teeth. One opened his mouth and the other spoke. They confided all their ugliest secrets. During work hours, they spoke on the phone up to ten times a day. Phoebe would call Neil to tell him she'd licked an envelope. Neil would call Phoebe to tell her he'd moved a paper clip. Endearing nicknames changed from week to week. (Coolio became

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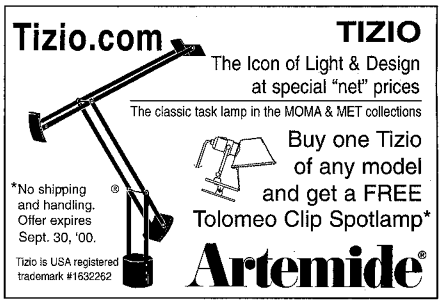

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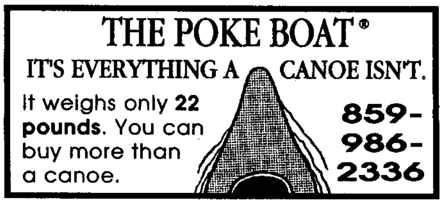

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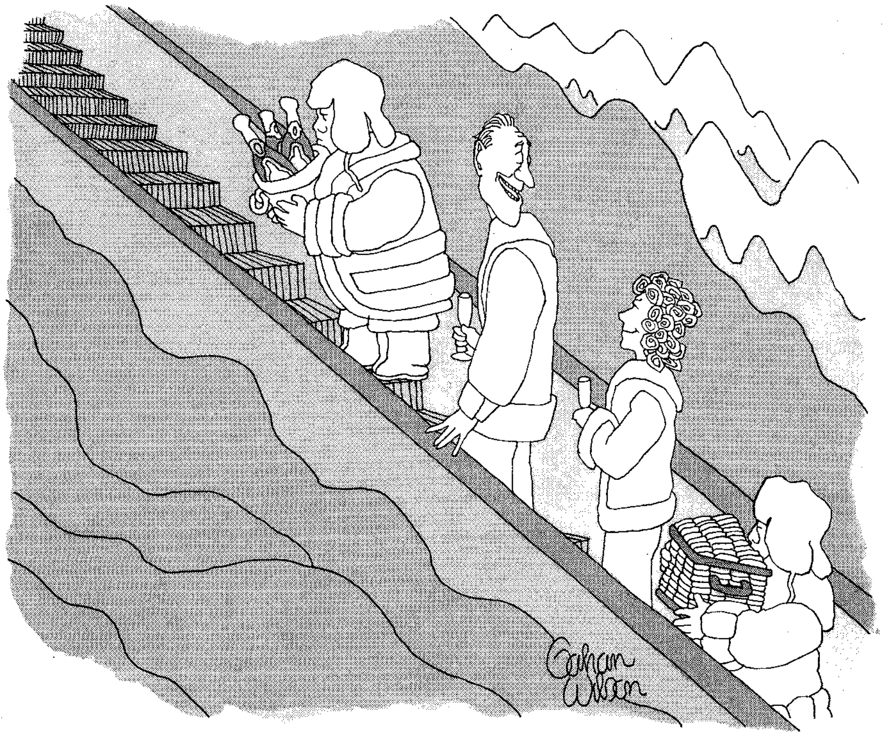
Julio, which became Wubble, which became Booboo, which became Looboo, which eventually became Wooboo, for reasons that were never entirely clear.)

Is it any wonder she began to let herself go?

At least, that's how Phoebe viewed her subsequent seven-pound weight gain. To hide the ill effects, she dressed in elastic-waist skirts and oversized men's shirts. And she stopped looking in the mirror for days at a time, after which point she'd be unable to do anything but look in the mirror—and chastise herself for having been so careless with what she still regarded as her greatest asset. It was in those moments that she'd vow to run four miles a day for the rest of her life and never eat another hot meal. A few days later, however, her resolve would be lost. Because her and Neil's home was built for comfort and satiety, warm blankets and three-cheese ravioli. And because Neil didn't seem to care if she was thin or fat. "I'll love you whatever you look like, Booboo" was among his favorite lines.

You'd think that that would have been exactly what Phoebe needed to hear. In fact, it was part of the problem, her adult identity having been constructed (by and large) on the response she found herself able to elicit from the opposite sex. But the opposite sex (minus Neil, whom she came to think of less as a man than as a kind of third-sex family member) was nowhere in sight. On Friday nights, while her peers hooked up with strangers at downtown-Manhattan Martini lounges, Phoebe could be found eating nonfat peanut-butter-cup frozen yogurt in bed. And when the yogurt was all gone she and Neil (more often than not) eschewed coitus for the far less frenetic and arguably more therapeutic pleasures of cuddling. That sex was far from the centerpiece of their relationship came as something of a relief in practice; in theory it left Phoebe deeply dissatisfied. It made her think that everyone else was having all the fun, and that the love she and Neil had for each other was somehow insubstantial. She still expected love to be as tirelessly tension-filled as it was in books and movies.

Where once keeping house had felt like playing house, Phoebe now grew exhausted and listless at the very idea of a supermarket expedition. And where once she'd dreamed of having a boyfriend who'd cook for her she now grew misty-eyed when she recalled eating Lucky Charms for dinner. It wasn't long before she began to blame Neil for having made her fat—as a ploy to keep her away from other men who might have been attracted to her were it not for this tumescent tummy, these turgid thighs. She was mad at Neil for letting himself go, too. For the first six months of their relationship, he'd donned crisp shirts and smart suits. Now whole weekends went by during which he wore the same sagging sweatpants and holey Brandeis T-shirt. Even more offensive, soon after they moved in together, he stopped holding in his farts. At first he'd say, "I'm sorry." Then he stopped saying anything at all. Then he did it willfully. To think that his gaseous emissions had once been a source of amusement and even hilarity!



"I understand the Everest climb used to be quite a chore."

Phoebe had stopped laughing.

Seemingly overnight, the smallest things about Neil Shmertz began to vex her beyond reason. There was the way he justified his existence ("I'm the kind of guy who works behind the scenes") and walked with his ass sticking out (why couldn't he slouch like everyone else?) and used the word "perspire" instead of "sweat." And he was always so cleanly shaven—couldn't he let his beard grow out for even one day? Then there was the mole on his back with the three brittle whiskers growing out of it. Why oh why wouldn't he let her pluck them?

Increasingly, she was embarrassed to be seen in his company.

And on the rare occasions when they still had sex he "made love" to her so carefully, so tactfully, so goddam generously—always waited until she'd had her orgasm before he had his. Considered himself the reigning King of Cunnilingus. Displayed unrivalled responsibility when it came to birth control. He was only too convinced that Phoebe had been exploited in the past, and only too intent on being the one who really loved her, the one who wasn't just using her. (It never occurred to him that she might have had an opportunistic streak herself.)

There came a time when the safe haven she and Neil had established began to feel as suffocating as the Brooklyn House of Detention.

It was around the same time that he began to speak primarily in baby talk.

He'd say, "Neily doesn't think his favewit bunny wabby wanth to be hith bestest fwend anymore."

To which Phoebe would reply, "Neily's favorite bunny wabby needs a little time to think."

But time only made her sadder—then madder. Picking fights with Neil Shmertz was never an easy trick, because he never actually fought back. He'd just sit there looking like a circus clown—Phoebe kept expecting a red ball to appear spontaneously on the tip of his nose—and uttering guilt-inducing inanities like "I've tried to make you a really nice home."

"But you're always trying to control me!" she'd bark back.

"How has Neily tried to control you?"

"You always want to go to bed early!"

"Has Neily ever told you that you had to go to bed at the same time as him?"

"What am I supposed to do—go out by myself?"

"You could go meet friends. Neily never told you not to see your friends."

"What friends? I don't have any friends! I lost them all when I moved in with Neily!"

So the conversations would go. And they'd end with dire predictions on Phoebe's part: "Maybe it wasn't meant to be." "Maybe we're just hanging on for the sake of hanging on." "Maybe we're only together because we're too scared to be apart."

"But I love you."

That Neil could come up with a line like that in the face of such abuse—to Phoebe, it seemed so terribly weak. She would have had more respect for him if he'd told her to fuck off.

The fact was that "true love" bored her now—its ritualized lassitude, its infantilizing gestures, its debilitating vows, its pop-song platitudes, its prosaic piffle. The "I'd be lost without you." And "You're the best thing that ever happened to me." And "I want to spend the rest of my life with you." And "I want to be the father of your children." And "I've never been closer to anyone." And "You're the only girl for me." And "I'm the luckiest guy in New York." And "I'll always take care of you." And "I can't sleep without you." And "I want to die in my sleep holding you in my arms when we're both ninety-nine." And "I want to be buried next to you." And "I thought about what I'd do if you were paralyzed from the neck down . . . " And "I'd be there for you—I really would." And "If you don't want me in your life, I'll walk out that door right now and you'll never see me again—is that what you want?" And "Well, what *are* you saying?" And "Whatever." And "Someday maybe you'll appreciate someone's efforts to be genuinely close to you."

She took to fantasizing that Neil would die a painless death, if not in his sleep, then perhaps at sea. She would feel terrible and all. She could even see herself breaking down mid-eulogy, having just transported the grieving crowd to life-embracing laughter as she recalled Neil's near-religious faith in the value of clean countertops. In retrospect, his various idiosyncrasies would come to seem charming. And how important she'd feel to be at the center of such a senseless fatality! How little choice she'd have but to forge a new life for herself without him!

She couldn't get over the feeling that in some fundamental way she'd failed to realize her youth, the lacunae of which seemed ever more notable than the narratives it did contain. It was the passion she missed the most—the acting out before an enraptured male gaze. She fantasized about being chained to a radiator. She wanted to lose herself in someone else's power trip. In a weird way, she even missed Pablo Miles. Or Peter Mandelbaum. Or whatever the fuck his name was. It didn't really matter in the end.

It was in this state of mind, one morning on the F train to Manhattan, that Phoebe first laid eyes on her next potential objectifier, his head bent down over a paperback copy of "A Streetcar Named Desire," the laces untied on his Stan Smith sneakers, the cuffs rolled on his unwashed bluejeans, an aura of rage-tinged melancholy hovering in the foreground of his all-American good looks. And there was something about his eyes—gray-green eyes that invoked images of unmade beds in roadside motels. By Fourteenth Street, she'd already envisioned the two of them Sunday-brunching at Grange Hall. By Twenty-third, she was trying to figure out who would bring whom to whose Thanksgiving. By Thirty-fourth, they were spread-eagled on a giant pink beach blanket somewhere off the coast of Portugal. ♦

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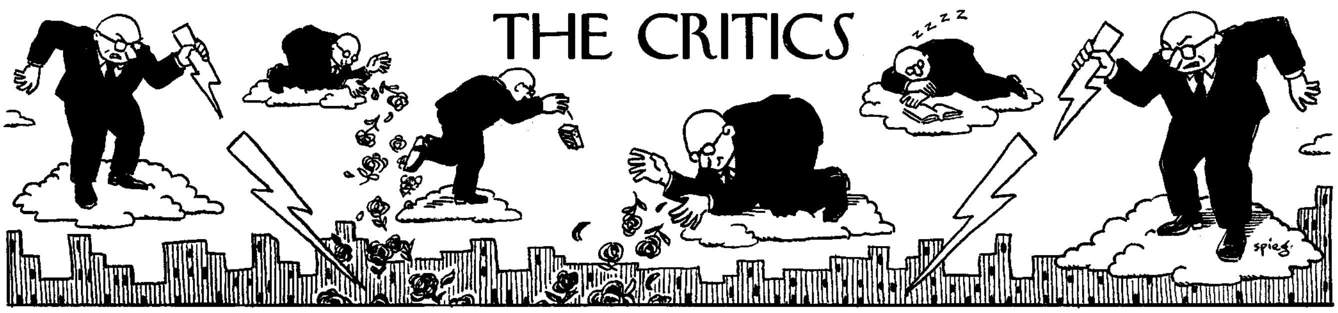


THE ART WORLD

THE BLOOMING BEAST

Rockefeller Center gets a new "Puppy."

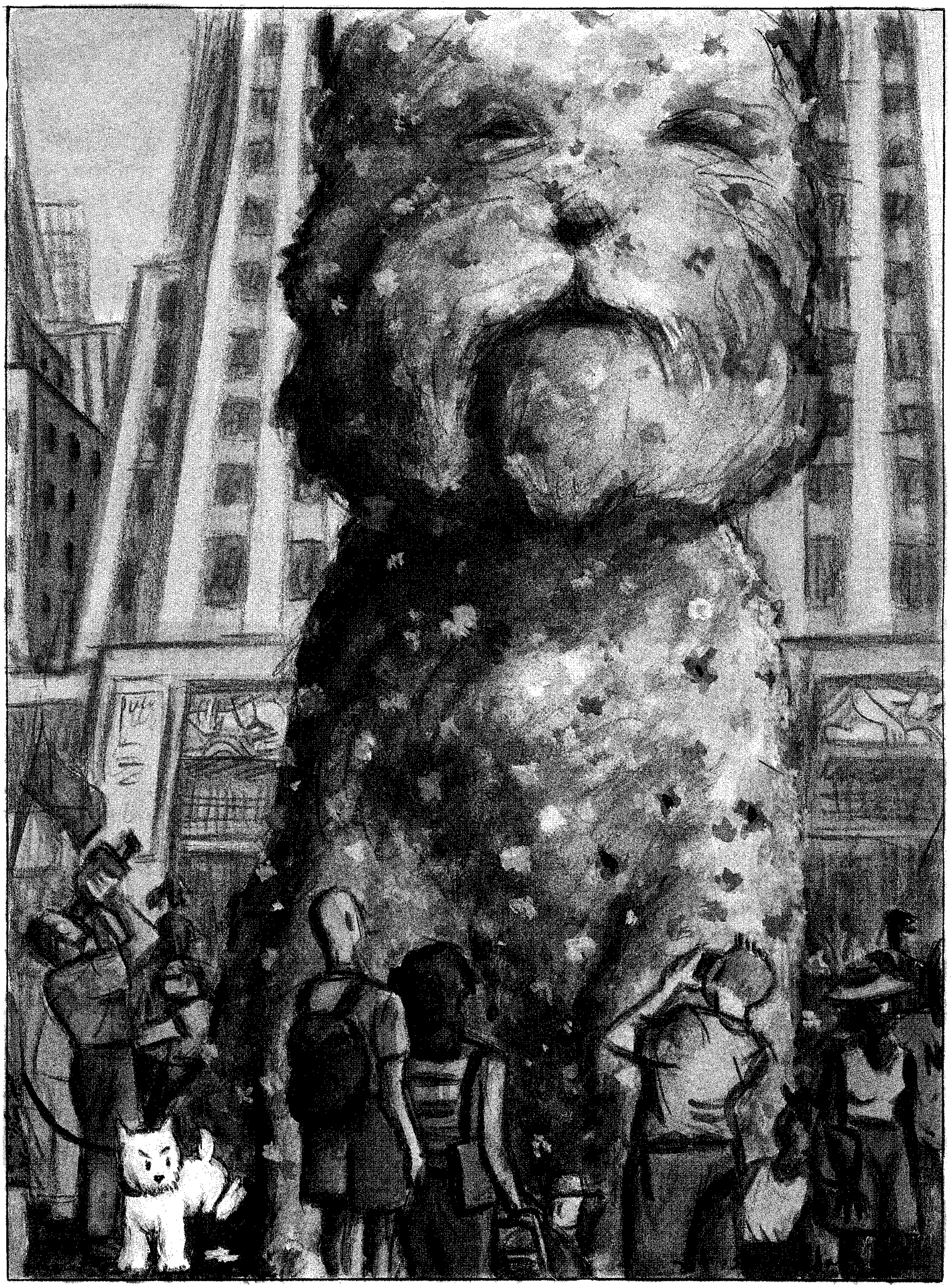
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The first time I saw "Puppy," the four-story West Highland terrier by Jeff Koons, which is occupying the wonted berth of the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center until September 5th, it was in the courtyard of an eighteenth-century palace in a small German town. This was eight years ago. An edition of the grandest of international contemporary-art exhibitions, Documenta, held sway in nearby Kassel. "Puppy" was not part of it. The director of that show, a vociferous Belgian named Jan Hoet, had made a public point of excluding Koons from the lineup of a hundred and ninety invited artists. To Hoet, Koons was anathema, as he was to other establishment types, not for his artistic audacity—Documenta and its ilk are mother hens of the far out—but for his professional damned cheek. With entrepreneurial strategies that included ad campaigns announcing a new series of his work, Koons had outflanked all proper art-world authority to engage audiences both moneyed and, to some extent, popular. Moreover, he was rude. He said things like this: "In the art world, I have always found everyone very weak." A mother hen can put up with a lot, but being insulted on top of being disregarded is very apt to darken her mien. Privately backed, the first incarnation of "Puppy" made hay of Hoet's ostracizing edict. It worked. For many of us who saw it then, the great flowering pooch blew Documenta IX quite away.

That should have been Koons's shining hour, when, at the age of thirty-seven, he began to reach his goal of becoming the Beatles of art: agent and symbol of sophisticated innovation in synch with mass appeal. But he more nearly proved to be art's second-actless Orson Welles. "Puppy" only briefly buoyed a foundering career. Koons's woes included an ambient wave of fashionable disgust with the supposed excesses of the nineteen-eighties. The notoriously "political" Whitney Biennial of 1993 amounted, in part, to an anti-Koonsian saturnalia—rather poignantly, given his art's clear influence on the glossy presentational modes of so many of the show's P.C. paladins. But Koons's own hubris—in the form of a manic, terrible show in 1991 that solemnized his collaboration with and brief marriage to the Hungarian-Italian porn star and politician Ilona Staller, also known as La Cicciolina—caused his downfall. Winsome images of hard-core sex, meant to draw everybody into the enchanted circle of the couple's exemplary bliss, grossed almost everybody out. More gravely, the artist's usual formal rigor dissolved in half-baked eclecticism. Koons, who had never set a foot wrong in his previous work, stepped off a cliff. He all but disappeared from the scene until last December. A show at the Sonnabend Gallery of new work, featuring some lively neo-Pop paintings, was good but notably tentative.

So the triumphal entry of "Puppy" into Manhattan feels displaced in time. The piece won't blow New York away, and not just because nothing non-nuclear can ever do that. In this distracted era, even the creation of a second floral colossus is unlikely to resuscitate Koons's lost momentum. ("Split Rocker," a kindergarten-Cubist steed derived from joined halves of two rocking toys, was installed last month in Avignon, France.) But I hope that the big dog's undimmed charm will bring overdue attention to the artist's halcyon project. Once you allow for his rigidly junior-achiever persona—which might make a Kathie Lee Gifford pensive—"Puppy" remains a remarkably cogent vision of art's recent worldly estate. Koons's funny, peculiarly beautiful works of the eighties are philosophical objects par excellence. They include factory-fresh vacuum cleaners hermetically sealed in Plexiglas, basketballs suspended in tanks of treated water, liquor advertisements reprinted in seductively heightened colors, an Aqua-Lung cast in bronze (made, he said, with the thought of someone who "had enough courage and really wanted to go for it"), gift-shop figurines blown up in gleaming stainless steel, and outrageously gorgeous porcelain and painted-wood statues of determinedly banal subjects. (Might I interest you in Michael Jackson with a chimp?) Each technically dazzling piece knows something about us—our half-guilty love of luxury, our abject yearnings for safety and equipoise, our wild, childhood nostalgias. Any of them may prompt the sense of "alienated majesty" that, according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, attends another person's expression of our own buried thoughts. Koons, at his best, is a bard of all the world's collective delirium. The

SKETCHBOOK BY ART SPIEGELMAN



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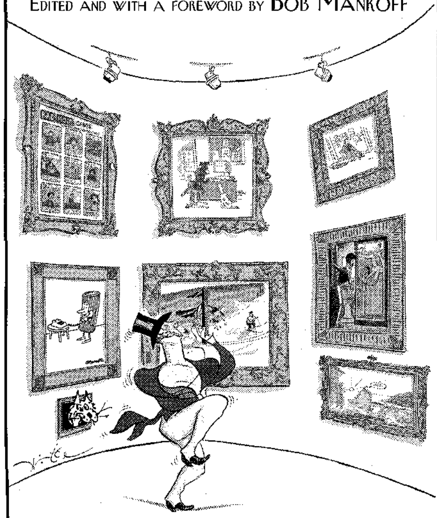

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spookily delightful "Puppy" clinches it.

"Puppy" is a design rather than a unique sculpture. Like a Sol LeWitt wall drawing, it exists in and as a set of instructions even when it is not physically present, or, as at the moment, when it is present in two places. (A clone currently greets visitors to the Bilbao Guggenheim.) The "Puppy" plan calls for about twenty-five tons of potting soil, an internal-irrigation apparatus, and seventy thousand plantings of those annuals—impatiens, begonia, lobelia—that reward perfunctory gardeners with relentlessly fecund splotches of peppy hues. As always with Koons, the demotic association of the material is as important as the motif—here, a pet fancier's sentimental tchotchke. Every Koons work is an ode on the labyrinth of taste. Condescending—in the old, positive, nobly obliged sense—to the least discriminating sensibilities, "Puppy" packs a spectrum of epiphanies for more educated contemplation. In its visceral manipulation of architectural space—standing up to its environment while relating directly to the viewer—it is as powerfully effective as any work by Richard Serra, and much more fun. But nobody's take is definitive. Irony-free, the work countenances all manner of responses, including the scorn of folks who get a kick out of being scornful. While I was viewing it, a surly-looking kid among a bunch of teen-agers spluttered, "That's dumb!" Right you are, son. Maybe only the purest nihilism can stare down "Puppy"—a thought suggested by terrorists in Bilbao who, in 1997, tried unsuccessfully to load it with remote-control grenades before a ceremony at which the King of Spain was expected. The Weltanschauung of "Puppy" does not encompass evil.

There is a tradition in modern thought which links evil with so-called kitsch. It reflects the historic traumas of totalitarian regimes that keyed their propaganda to petit-bourgeois values—as if the values themselves were to blame, and as if artistic elevation equated with political virtue, which it doesn't. (Leni Riefenstahl was brilliant, and Hermann Göring was a connoisseur.) If "kitsch" points to anything, it is simply the generic representation of undifferentiated "good taste," ungrounded in personal experience. In this regard, come to think of it, kitsch is the mass-franchise variant of "good taste" itself, which a wit of my acquaintance defines as the residue of somebody else's privilege. I fail to detect a moral emergency in anyone's reliance on second- or even eleventh-hand aesthetics. Liking is liking. Aladdin-fashion, Koons rubs the lamp of "bad" taste, and out pops a genie of irrepressible Eros—the sheer human capacity to love anything.

In all of this, I take for granted that you, Reader, do or will or would like "Puppy," because I cannot imagine that it's reasonably possible not to. What makes the work all the more admirable to me is its victory over the less than ideal conditions of its present site. While it gains undeniable éclat from the context of Rockefeller Plaza's urban altar, it loses much potential by being squeezed behind the skating rink and lofted on a pedestal. I miss the pleasures of a long, unobstructed approach to a "Puppy" that was plunked on the common ground—a situation that incidentally enabled the old near-and-far dance with which, for example, we are solemnly taught to appreciate Monet. (This is, hands down, the most richly and subtly painterly sculpture ever made—and without a drop of paint.) As it is, one has only the options of a distant, heroic view from head on and a close encounter from the side. But that's O.K. The joy of the blooming beast is equal to anything short of a hard frost. Simple in effect, that joy is provocatively complex in implication. It stops thought dead, but it may then get one thinking. Here's a sample topic: What, exactly, prevents other art from being this good? ♦

CORRECTION OF THE WEEK
From the Monterey (Calif.) County Herald.

An article Wednesday on the possible loss of ABC television programming in the Monterey area contained several errors caused by a computer problem. A feature that checks spelling inadvertently changed several nouns, converting KGO, the San Francisco TV station, to GO; AT&T to Acct.; KNTV, the San Jose TV station, to NATIVE; KSBW, the Salinas TV station, to CASPAR; "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" to "Buffet the Vampire Slayer," and Maury Povich, the TV talk show host, to Marry Pivot, among other errors.

BOOKS

FOR LOVE AND MONEY

An early version of Fitzgerald's Great American Novel is resurrected.

BY CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT

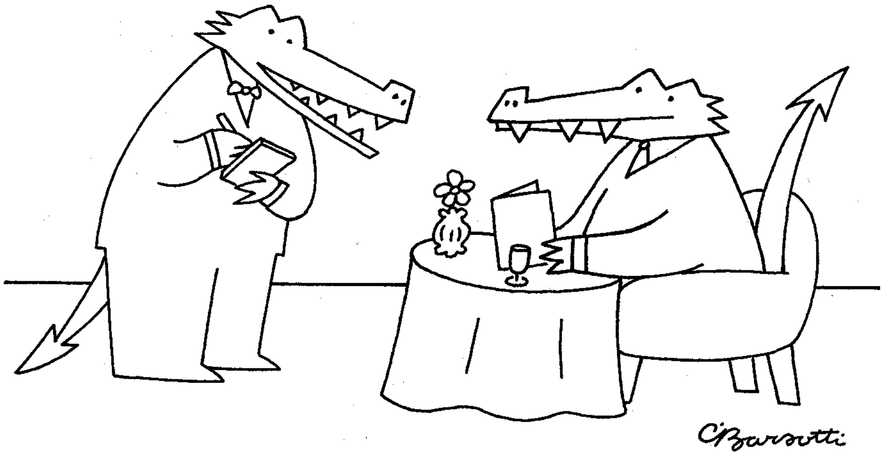
"I think my novel is about the best American novel ever written," F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote to Max Perkins, his editor at Scribner's, in August of 1924. Perkins had to take the appraisal on faith. It would be at least a month, Fitzgerald warned, before his new manuscript could be completed and revised and shipped off to New York from his home on the French Riviera. The book was still a little rough in places, and Fitzgerald worried, too, that it might not be long enough to receive the serious consideration it deserved. But when, three months later, Perkins read the manuscript—whose title was to be either "Trimalchio in West Egg" or "The Great Gatsby"— he came close to agreeing with the young author's assessment. He wrote back at once that "the novel is a wonder," possessed of vitality and glamour but also of "a kind of mystic atmosphere." He recommended only a few changes, mostly along the lines of providing more background for the story's rich and enigmatic hero. Fitzgerald, eager to make the best even better, happily set to work again: "If it's as good as you say, when I finish with the proof it'll be perfect."

Fitzgerald was twenty-eight when "The Great Gatsby" was published, in the spring of 1925. He was already a celebrity, as the author of two immensely popular Jazz Age novels—"This Side of Paradise" and "The Beautiful and Damned"—but their commercial success had not earned him the literary standing he desired. ("I believe you might become a very popular trashy novelist without much difficulty," his Princeton friend and mentor Edmund Wilson volunteered, on reading "Paradise.") What his writing had earned him, instead, was a great deal of money—by the mid-twenties he could count on twenty-five hundred dollars per story—which, reversing all his prospects, allowed him to marry the expensive girl of his formerly anguished dreams, and to live a life that exemplified the wildness of the age. Scott and Zelda had been jumping into fountains and getting into drunken brawls ("FITZGERALD KNOCKS OFFICER THIS SIDE OF PARADISE") for several years before they fled to France. They went, in part, to escape their exhausting roles as America's favorite models of postwar, post-moral effervescence, but mostly so that Scott could write a more serious book. Wilson had prescribed an expatriate bout in France as a kind of school for style, urging Fitzgerald to leave behind the hotels and plumbing and prosperity and ideals that so tightly bound him to America: "Your novels would never be the same afterward."

Fitzgerald's success enabled him to marry the expensive girl of his anguished dreams.

EVERETT COLLECTION

"The Great Gatsby" was very consciously a novel about American prosperity and ideals; Fitzgerald did not so much leave the country as back away from it far enough to broaden his view. Wilson was right, of course, in predicting the novel's extraordinary difference from Fitzgerald's earlier work, but the fact that the facile and fizzy author produced what may be the century's most widely read and admired American novel was a mystery that not even Wilson was prepared to explain. The publication of "Trimalchio" (Cambridge; $39.95), a reconstruction of the manuscript that Fitzgerald so excitedly sent to Perkins, suggests that readers may finally gain some insights into the mystery. For this is the manuscript as it existed before Fitzgerald made what he called the "1000 minor corrections" and "several more large ones" on the galleys, the resetting of which he predicted would be "one of the most expensive affairs since Madame Bovary"—a fair indication of the standards he intended to meet. "Trimalchio," in other words, is "The Great Gatsby" be-



"Yes, sir, fat free—straight from the gym."

fore Fitzgerald got it exactly right.

The title (which Fitzgerald himself shortened) attests to the scope of his ambitions. The character to which it refers is a filthy-rich ex-slave and extravagant party host in "The Satyricon," the notorious Roman satire by Petronius, who was the Arbiter of Elegance of Nero's court. Blithely obscene, mocking everything from the Odyssey to table manners, the work was doted on by Wilde and inspired both Yeats and Joyce, and—thanks to a 1922 attempt to suppress a new translation—it was very much in vogue during the Neronian age in which Fitzgerald was writing. For Fitzgerald, the comparison of Gatsby with his Roman counterpart served to magnify the all-American hero through the lens of classical allusion. The overarching significance of his title was not far from that of "Ulysses," also published in 1922 and immediately prescribed for Fitzgerald's further stylistic development by Wilson, to whom the budding genius responded glumly, "I wish it was layed [sic] in America."

As so often happens with a bid for literary posterity, Fitzgerald's escaped the notice of daily reviewers and contemporary readers almost entirely. Although important critics like H. L. Mencken did recognize the nature of Fitzgerald's achievement, "Gatsby" was his first commercial failure, and most copies of the second printing were still in the Scribner's warehouse when he died, broke and all but forgotten, in 1940. The revival began almost immediately thereafter. "Gatsby" was republished in 1941, and its enshrinement steadily assumed proportions as astounding as they are, even today, painfully ironic: "Gatsby" now sells more copies in a month than it sold in Fitzgerald's lifetime; the BBC has just filmed a fourth version of the book, whose author died while struggling to earn a living in Hollywood writing screenplays. And Fitzgerald himself has been as mythologized as his hero. Aside from the predictable groaning shelf of biographies, there are collections of his letters to his editor and his agent, his notebooks, a de-luxe facsimile edition of an early, handwritten manuscript of "Gatsby," a de-luxe facsimile of his business ledger, and a reader's companion to "Tender Is the Night" that compares, in table form, sentences Fitzgerald "stripped" from thirty-seven of his stories with their slightly reworked versions in the novel. And then there are the "F. Scott Fitzgerald Manuscripts," in eighteen volumes. Given the depletion of unexploited source material, it is no surprise that the "Trimalchio" manuscript has been resurrected. Nor is it a surprise that its publication raises moral questions.

Smaller questions first: the manuscript as presented is actually something of a fudge, since Fitzgerald's typescript has been lost. To reconstruct this phantom document, "Trimalchio" 's dauntless editor, James L. W. West III, began by examining two copies of the typeset galleys that Scribner's had made from it. (In a footnote that all too clearly illuminates the perils of modern scholarship, he reports that his task was jealously impeded by the University of South Carolina's library, which owns one set of the galleys and allowed him to inspect it "only for two days, 14-15 August 1996." The University of South Carolina Press, it turns out, has published its own version of Fitzgerald's proofs, in a near-sacramental, facsimile edition of five hundred numbered copies, an event we do not learn of here.) Next, West removed an overlay of copy-editing that Scribner's automatically supplied. However, since there was no way to know just what the copy editors had changed, the author's wayward patterns of spelling and punctuation were adapted from the earlier, handwritten manuscript—itself a different version of the novel but offering "the original texture of Fitzgerald's accidentals." Even Fitzgerald, who as early as 1922 happily anticipated a professorial analysis of "my 'second' or 'neo-flapper' manner," might have boggled at a scrutiny of comma placement once reserved for Shakespeare's Second Folio.

Yet, even if we allow for the continuing deification and cannibalization of a writer whom Cyril Connolly once called "an American version of the Dying God," the Cambridge publication of "Trimalchio," which its editor claims is "a separate and distinct work of art," poses moral questions of a larger order. Should this literary artifact be available in bookstores, alongside "Gatsby" and "Tender Is the Night"? How do we justify the marketing of a work that the author never intended us to see?

The greatest shame for a writer like Fitzgerald is to write badly and the greatest sin to write less than his best. It is true that he did both throughout his life, for money, or because of alcohol, or Zelda, or whatever it was that made him place such needs and demands above his talent. But not in "Gatsby," his only mature yet uncorrupted book. Although there is nothing embarrassingly "bad" in this earlier version, the revelation of even minor deformations evokes a particular sense of violation. For "The Great Gatsby" is a book that owes much of its aura to our inescapable knowledge that it, like

Gatsby's dream, is a manufacture of extreme purity wrested from a life of tragedy and waste, and charged—by the author as much as by anyone else—with that life's redemption.

What "Trimalchio" offers, and what gives it value, is a view of Fitzgerald not as a brief-lived poet-god—our link between Keats and James Dean—but as a writer at work, and on a book so tightly crafted that much of it seems as inevitable as unrhymed writing gets. Fitzgerald's lyric incisiveness isn't every reader's ideal, since it leaves out many things—psychology, detail, the messiness of life—yet it makes for a tautness of line and a verbal iridescence that few techniques can match. When, in 1950, Edmund Wilson examined an early text of "Madame Bovary," he claimed to be excited by its very flatness, and said that it gave him a higher opinion of Flaubert "to see him bringing these paragraphs to life, turning on the music and color." Perhaps this is just the eager scholar's way out of the moral dilemma: satisfying one's curiosity about a work one has no right to read. But then it was Fitzgerald who suggested (adapting his beloved Keats) that the mark of a first-rate mind is to be able to contain two conflicting ideas at once—to condemn the idle rich, say, yet bask in realms of gold—and live with them both.

Daisy cries into Jay Gatsby's beautiful pile of colored shirts, and her voice is, as ever, a deathless song, low and thrilling, full of money. Gatsby, however, has not acquired his dazzling smile. The yellow cocktail music played by an orchestra as the earth lurches away from the sun is as implausibly and marvellously yellow as we remember, but the afternoon sky outside the Buchanans' home is fairy blue, not blue honey. It is Vladimir Epstien who composes the "Jazz History of the World," not Vladimir Tostoff (an abstrusely obscene name lifted from Joyce's Toby Tostoff, in "Ulysses," a mythic masturbator who "tossed off" his sexual organ so often that he destroyed it), and we get to hear a long description of the score, which Fitzgerald was wise to cut. Perhaps the most touching original detail, testimony to the youth and grasp of the author of "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," is the price of the wedding necklace that Tom Buchanan gives to Daisy: in "Gatsby," it is—quite ridiculously enough—three hundred and fifty thousand dollars; in "Trimalchio," the string of pearls that Daisy flings into the wastebasket set Tom back seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

But then, in America, such things were suddenly possible, and Fitzgerald gave us a literary country reeling with unloosed possibilities: a brand-new America where the moral conscience had been doused with gin, and pop tunes described the deepest human feelings. In both versions of the book, Gatsby hauls an ever-lurking pianist from a cranny of his mansion to serenade Daisy with love's anthem "Ain't We Got Fun." Far more is made of his devotion to pop tunes in "Trimalchio," where the works of Tin Pan Alley are revealed to have had a transforming effect in Gatsby's adolescence, their routine messages converted by his colossal innocence into a guide for living, akin to the cheap romances that inflamed Emma Bovary, or the novels of chivalry that set Don Quixote on his path. Fitzgerald liked to say that his own lyric gift might have gone the way of Cole Porter, except that he wanted to "preach at people" rather than merely entertain them. Gatsby's musical debt presents, in neat and vivid form, the classic Fitzgerald contradiction, in which he preaches against the things he most hopelessly loves: the tawdry products of a base society that cast a false and indispensable enchantment.

The single stunning difference between "Trimalchio" and Fitzgerald's familiar fairy tale is that Daisy comes to Gatsby's house with her suitcases packed, ready to run away with him, and he sends her home. "In other words you've got her—and now you don't want her," Nick, our narrator and Gatsby's Sancho Panza, reasonably observes. Despite Gatsby's protests—"Of course I want her"—this turn of events does give a seasoned "Gatsby" reader pause. It seems to violate all we know about these characters: Gatsby the obsessed lover, erecting an empire and stringing it with lights to impress a girl; careless, thoughtless Daisy, too languid and desireless to lift a lovely arm during the novel's long summer heat. If Fitzgerald's original impulse was to fashion Daisy with the will and courage to follow Gatsby into his dream, even momentarily, what does it say about the dream at the heart of the book that Gatsby turns her down?

Once the shock of reading this anomalous episode subsides, there follows an equally shocking realization: it only emphasizes what we've always known about these characters but do not easily acknowledge. Indeed, Fitzgerald probably cut the incident because it makes the wreckage of Gatsby's fantasy too clearly inevitable: why read on? Yet didn't we always understand this inevitability, even as we kept turning pages and hoping against it? For the determined dreamer, it isn't the object of the dream that counts; it's the dream itself. Gatsby and Daisy couldn't face each other across a breakfast table every day without destroying his ideal as surely, if not as poetically, as they do through betrayal and death. And Gatsby, for whom disillusion was a form of death, knew this better than anyone—except, of course, Fitzgerald.

In "Trimalchio," Fitzgerald plays a peculiar variation on this oldest of romantic themes. When Gatsby sends Daisy home, it is to "go to her husband and tell him that she never loved him"—a desire he expresses, in passing, in the completed book, but as just one more fantastic element of his plan rather than as a cold condition for its execution. But here it isn't really Tom upon whom Gatsby wants revenge. Nor is he primarily seeking to eradicate the time that Daisy spent with someone else, as he is in "Gatsby," where his attempt to change the past seems nearly divine in its scale and challenge. At this point, "Trimalchio" is, briefly, a truly different book: less awash in the golden light of quixotry, more literal and harsh. For the most startling revelation in Fitzgerald's manuscript is that Gatsby wants revenge upon Daisy, and not for leaving him but for having ruined his life by loving him in the first place.

The regret embedded in a long-anticipated kiss is a subject with some literary pedigree. Most famously, there is Proust's enamored hero Charles Swann, pausing, as he lowers his lips to his beloved Odette, to study her face as it will appear to him for the last time unpossessed. What Swann is giving up is his own anticipation and his lover's mystery. What Jay Gatsby gave up as he lowered his lips to Daisy Fay's, in the distant Louisville autumn when they first met, is a part of himself that—as "Gatsby" barely whispers, as "Trimalchio" swears aloud—he has fiercely regretted losing ever since. In the heightened poetics of "Gatsby" 's record of that kiss, it is hard to know exactly what the loss entails: "His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God."

Here the earlier manuscript makes clear what might be called the emotional apprehension beneath Fitzgerald's romping prose. "Trimalchio" 's Nick, on being told what Gatsby has sent Daisy home to do, sees the task not only as a redress of time but as "some sort of atonement" for Daisy herself, a rite of purification, and he warns Gatsby not to ask too much of her. "Daisy's a person," Nick tells him. "She's not just a figure in your dream." And, he adds, she probably doesn't feel that she owes him anything at all.

"She does, though," this Gatsby responds, expressing an opinion that Fitzgerald may have cut in order to make his hero more sympathetic, and less autobiographical. "Why—I'm only thirty-two. I might be a great man if I could forget that once I lost Daisy." The petulance is unsettling—there is, fortunately, nothing left of it in the grandly deluded knight of the book we know—yet Gatsby goes even further in his explanation of what he is owed, and exactly when the debt began: "I used to think that wonderful things were going to happen to me, before I met her. And I knew it was a great mistake for a man like me to fall in love—and then one night I let myself go, and it was too late."

What on earth does Gatsby think he might have become without Daisy, the lure and goal for all he has achieved? Might he have been an honest businessman? Might he really have gone to Oxford, or read some of the books in his library? Is it possible that he could care for any of these things? If Gatsby's voice here is almost intolerably jarring, perhaps that is because it is not Gatsby's voice we are hearing but Fitzgerald's, helplessly intruding—Gatsby "started out as one man I knew and then changed into myself," he wrote—at the very moment when he stood at the brink both of his full creative powers and of the catastrophe that would permanently deprive him of their use.

The resentment Fitzgerald came to feel about his catastrophic love is evident in one of the few truly bitter letters he wrote, in his later years, to his daughter, Scottie. "When I was your age I lived with a great dream," he informed her in 1938, when she was sixteen and away at school, "then the dream divided one day when I decided to marry your mother after all, even though I knew she was spoiled and meant no good to me. I was sorry immediately I had married her." Fitzgerald probably set the date of his awful revelation back in time somewhat, for dramatic effect. But it is true that from the start his friends openly worried that Zelda would ruin him, because of her extravagance, because of her jealousy of his work, and—perhaps as a result of that jealousy—because he was unable to write when she was present, yet was terrified of what she might do when out of his sight. ("He is going to leave Zelda at the Commodore," Edmund Wilson assured a mutual friend in 1920, when the Fitzgeralds had been married about three weeks. "I trust that she will seize the opportunity to run away with the elevator boy or something.") But it was in 1924, when he was working all out to complete "Gatsby," that Fitzgerald seems to have fully understood what a mistake it had been for a man like him to fall in love.

That summer, Zelda—already visibly unstable to the rare pair of sober eyes—had a romance with a French aviator that was the talk of the *plage* by the time her husband learned about it. Judging from the highly dramatized reports that both husband and wife have left, it is possible that she asked for a divorce; it is also possible that he planned a confrontation with the man, and even that he locked her in her room to put an end to it. But, whatever transpired between Scott and Zelda, the aviator quickly had enough and flew away, and calm was temporarily restored.

"I've been unhappy," Fitzgerald wrote to Perkins in August, in the same letter in which he crowed over the forthcoming novel, "but my work hasn't suffered from it. I am grown at last." A few weeks later, Zelda took an overdose of sleeping pills, and not long after that she was requiring a shot of morphine to pull her out of an attack of "nervous hysteria." The marriage soon became a desperate round of illnesses, battles, accusations, and—most painfully—earnest attempts at mutual salvation, after which the entire round began again. Years later, when Zelda had long ceased to be able to survive outside a mental hospital—she was first confined in 1930—and Fitzgerald's own life and career were in pieces, he recalled that it was in September, 1924, that "I knew something had happened that could never be repaired."

And yet even to wonder if the events of 1924 were responsible for the disillusion of the Great American Dreamer is to reduce Fitzgerald's subject to what Gatsby might call the merely personal. Fitzgerald's imagination frequently anticipated his life's tragedies. Planning his second novel, in August, 1920, the twenty-three-year-old author informed Charles Scribner II that both the hero and his beautiful young wife were to be "wrecked on the shoals of dissipation." In 1919, he wrote Edmund Wilson, only half joking, about his wild pursuit of the elusive Zelda: "Since I last saw you I've tried to get married and then tried to drink myself to death." There was always, it seems, a master plan for the destruction to come. How early the plan was in place is impossible to say: the hope to die poetically in the First World War, like Rupert Brooke; the plunge into hard liquor, at fifteen; the loss of the first golden girl he loved, before Zelda—he'd been too poor, too young, too undistinguished—or the final winning of Zelda herself. "A woman ruined Scott," Ernest Hemingway bluntly proclaimed about the fate of his friend, but in Fitzgerald's fiction the image of a teen-age *belle dame sans merci* long preceded his introduction to his future wife. And if winning his heroine turned out to be Fitzgerald's greatest catastrophe, it was also the one that could be blamed for all the others.

It is true that, as Fitzgerald told Perkins, his work did not immediately suffer from his unhappiness. In the course of turning "Trimalchio" into "Gatsby," he managed to excise the personal intrusions of anger and resentment and reality, purifying both his hero and the myth that he ultimately embodied. Only a few traces remain. In "Trimalchio," Gatsby's point-blank statement that he was ruined by falling in love leads to a passage that remains unchanged in "The Great Gatsby," and is one of the book's most untethered flights of poetry: Gatsby's recollection of a walk with Daisy on the night of the kiss, when he saw out of the corner of his eye "a secret place above the trees—he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder." Of course, he did not climb alone, and the resulting loss—curiously obscure but somehow related to life itself—seems immense.

How odd that this image of the freedom he gives up is so much more sensuously female than the woman who takes its place. Daisy is a girl, not a woman—just eighteen when Gatsby meets her, as Zelda was when she and Fitzgerald met—and we aren't told a thing about how she looks, how she feels to the touch. What color is her hair? Fitzgerald generally suggests that she is fair but once, surprisingly, that she is dark. Her eyes, her mouth? She is lovely; it doesn't matter how. Once, a tiny gust of powder rises from her bosom when she laughs, but this only makes her seem more fairylike, insubstantial; her voice is all the physical substance that she needs. Daisy's voluptuary foil is her husband's cheap and flashy mistress, Myrtle, whom Daisy brutally strikes down in Gatsby's car; the only emphatically female flesh in the book, in fact, is Myrtle's torn and bleeding breast, hanging open over her heart like a flap. "I *want* Myrtle Wilson's breast ripped off—it's exactly the thing," Fitzgerald enthused to a somewhat queasy Perkins. It seems a terrible revenge upon the "pap of life" that another woman had kept him from reaching.

It has long been noted that Fitzgerald, despite his sexually adventurous public stands on flappers and freedom, was a modest and even a prudish man. Both Zelda and his later "paramour," Sheilah Graham, attest to a relationship to women that was far more spiritual, even Quixote-like, than passionate; judging by the young age at which he began seriously to drink, it seems possible that it was a dawning sexual ambivalence that he initially meant to drown or to disguise. In his writing, there is a formal reticence about such matters that easily veers from the chivalrous to the preposterous. We are told that Gatsby once long ago "took" Daisy, and ever after has felt married to her. The lace-veiled verb recurs as the basis of a joke in "Tender Is the Night": "She came up against him with a forlorn whisper. 'Take me.' 'Take you where?' Astonishment froze him rigid." But Fitzgerald's genteel awkwardness seems to get the best of him when, in a passionate climax in the same book, we learn that the heroine's about-to-be lover has finally "kissed her hardy knees."

Far more convincingly erotic are Fitzgerald's nearly Marxian descriptions of the vast system of production that ultimately begets the vain, proud, childlike girls he worships, girls who convey all the strength of that system in the confidence that animates their slender frames. "For her sake trains began their run at Chicago and traversed the round belly of the continent to California," he writes of his heroine in "Tender Is the Night." "Chicle factories fumed and link belts grew link by link in factories," and, finally, "as the whole system swayed and thundered onward it lent a feverish bloom to such processes of hers as wholesale buying" (a process not to be confused with buying wholesale). A girl's fragility is all the more poignant when seen against the solidity of a very big house: "the strong walls, the steel of the girders, the breadth and beam and pomp" make a Fitzgerald heroine—here in the story "Winter Dreams," a study for "Gatsby"—all the more desirable. The mating of this

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heavily masculinized capitalism with a feminine eros of exquisite consumption yields Fitzgerald's America, thrillingly corrupt and perversely beautiful, as only a true innocent—economic, sexual, moral—would imagine it to be. And "Gatsby," more than any other of Fitzgerald's works, glorifies the country with this sexualized innocence, which is lavished, like his poetry, on our giant cars and our tinny music and our ruthless economics, and transforms them all into elements of romance and literary gold.

When a third, rather abstract breast appears, on the last page of "The Great Gatsby"—"the fresh, green breast of the new world"—any college-trained literary-symbol finder may react with a delight nearly equal to that of the man who conceives of suckling there. The man this time is Nick, not Gatsby, but no matter—Gatsby is dead, and Nick has passed from being his chief skeptic to his champion, a full believer in the nobility of the Gatsbyan quest. And in this geographical breast he spies the same chance that Gatsby glimpsed in the "pap of life" hidden above the treetops: the chance of finding "something commensurate to his capacity for wonder," something or someone able to live up to his dreams. Alas, no object sufficient to this prodigious capacity is apparent now any more than it was then. The green breast of earth was covered with houses long ago, and Nick—as unfit as Gatsby, now, for mere reality—has to head West in hope of finding something fresh and worthy of his wonder.

Here the teacher's chalk can hardly be restrained from dashing a few equations onto the blackboard: East to West = escape from civilization, lighting out for the territories, etc. This is a great American fiction, and a great American reality. The fact that "Gatsby" makes the connection so efficiently is part of its brilliance, and is part of the reason that it has come so close to being the official great American novel. Short, easy to read, filled with symbols and subtexts and allusions, and also beautiful, "Gatsby" is without doubt the most teachable American novel. In a half century of decreasing attention spans and increasing moral hunger, there can hardly be higher praise.

In a letter that Fitzgerald treasured all his life, T. S. Eliot wrote to him, in 1925, that he believed "Gatsby" to be the first advance in American fiction since Henry James. Eliot promised to write again to explain what he meant, but he never did. One can only assume that he had in mind Fitzgerald's easy mixture of symbolism and naturalism, the often pervading unreality of what a reader nevertheless accepts: the grim Valley of Ashes where poor Myrtle lives above her husband's auto-repair shop, or the moment when a billboard advertisement for an oculist is mistaken for the eyes of God. Eliot may also have admired the smoothly modern handling of a theme particularly meaningful to him, the pursuit of the Grail.

There has been a great deal of interest through the years in whether Fitzgerald was indebted for any of this to "The Waste Land," which was published in 1922; given the avidity of his reading and his literary hero worship, it may be so. (Eliot was responding to a copy of "Gatsby" that Fitzgerald had sent him, inscribed to the "Greatest of Living Poets from his entheusiastic worshipper." Eliot claimed not to have been prejudiced by the tribute, nor, apparently, was he prejudiced by the spelling.) On the other hand, several of Fitzgerald's earliest stories display a surrealist bleakness of empty landscapes and shrivelled souls which seems entirely native; his perception of the American nightmare always shadowed his American dream.

One undoubted intersection with Eliot's poem is the character of Trimalchio. In late 1922, Eliot (whose publisher had just brought out the almost suppressed "Satyricon") added a short Trimalchian story, printed in the original Latin and Greek, as an epigraph to "The Waste Land." In this uncharacteristically decorous and disquieting story, Trimalchio tells his guests how he once saw with his own eyes the Cumaean Sibyl, to whom the god Apollo had granted eternal life; she had neglected to ask for eternal youth, however, and by the time Trimalchio came upon her she had shrunk so horribly that she lived, dangling, inside a bottle. When local children asked her what she wanted, she replied, "I want to die."

Fitzgerald never fully reconciled himself to the concession he made to Scribner's when he relented on the title of the novel. "My heart tells me I should have named it 'Trimalchio,'" he wrote to Perkins in January, 1925; and, the following March, just weeks before publication, "I feel 'Trimalchio' might have been best after all." This persistent impulse hardly seems tied to matters of literary vogue or prestige. Rather, for a man who spent so much of his life in open fear of age and in steady flirtation with death—"You remember I used to say I wanted to die at thirty," he wrote to Perkins that December. "Well I'm twenty-nine and the prospect is still welcome"—it appears an understandable desire to name his book for a witness to the most extraordinary tragedy of living on after youth's demise.

"Scott died inside himself at around the age of thirty to thirty-five," Hemingway wrote to Perkins about a year after Fitzgerald's death, in December, 1940, at forty-four; "and his creative powers died somewhat later." Hemingway was trying to account for the "deadness" of Fitzgerald's final, incomplete, and posthumously published novel, "The Last Tycoon," written when "all the dust was off the butterfly's wing for a long time." Fitzgerald himself had written an only somewhat gentler elegy to his creative powers, in a letter to Scottie in the last month of his life, explaining that it is usually "the poetic" talent that matures early, "which mine was in large part." The past tense must have cost him dear. Fitzgerald was then living in Hollywood, where he had been writing a screenplay for Shirley Temple, and where he had suffered his first heart attack—at Schwab's drugstore, on Sunset Boulevard. (It does sometimes seem that the life was as carefully designed for symbolic explication as the books.)

Fitzgerald was laboring at the studios to scrape money together for Scottie's tuition at Vassar, and his last years of letters to her, filled with worry and advice, are among the most moving parental letters ever written, far truer and more substantive than anything in his later "creative" work. Although he struggled continuously with debts (his bank account, he reports one week, is down to twelve dollars), and he had to beg for magazine advances on fees a tenth of what he once earned, he begrudged her money only for taking a course called “English Prose Since 1800”: “Anybody that can’t read modern English prose by themselves is subnormal—and you know it.” Instead, to improve her writing style he advised her to study great poetry, and his letters are filled with rhapsodies on the subject, above all on Keats. He tells her that he has read the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” a hundred times: “About the tenth time I began to know what it was about, and caught the chime in it and the exquisite inner mechanics.”

This must be excellent advice, even if we don’t know how Scottie fared with it. We know how Fitzgerald fared: one could not better explain “Gatsby” ’s magic than to point to “the chime in it and the exquisite inner mechanics.” As for what the poem is about, Fitzgerald caught, perhaps as well as anyone ever has, the hovering threat of time and the decline inherent in consummation, even of a kiss. Yet Romantic poetry’s most famous message, the identity of truth and beauty, is something Fitzgerald effectively rewrote for a new national culture: beauty is youth, he told us, youth beauty, and the only way to happiness is through illusion. The cold unbearableness of truth is the message of his greatest book.

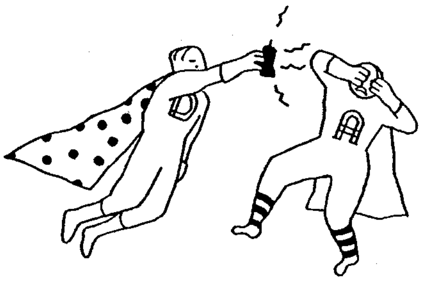
Gatsby dies of truth—Nick imagines him, in the hours before his actual death, realizing that Daisy will not call and will not come, looking out at a world stripped down to ugliness and terror. It is a world he has never seen before, and in which he cannot live. Don Quixote died of such truth, as did Emma Bovary—and there are those who think Fitzgerald died of it, too. Edmund Wilson writes of seeing him in his last years, trying to live without liquor, appearing strangely mild and banal and seeming to look around him with grownup eyes for the first time. He was grownup enough by then to try to make sure that Scottie would not be so disabled. “For premature adventure one pays an atrocious price,” he warned her, in one of his typical lectures from the heart concerning discipline, work, sobriety, driving in the rain, refusing to get in a car with a drunk, prose style, fame, self-honesty, just rewards, duty, honor, and moral courage. “It’s the logic of life that no young person ever gets away with anything.” ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Plowing the Dark, *by Richard Powers (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25).* Powers’s novels tend to be superintelligent, intricate, and consequential, and this one is no exception. In Seattle, a woman painter joins a team of software engineers who are devising a virtual-reality module; at the same time, an American hostage, moldering in a bare cell in Beirut, tries to mentally reconstruct his Stateside existence. Powers’s intellectual dexterity is dazzling, especially in the descriptions of virtual-reality programming, and he has plenty to say about the intersections of art, war, commerce, and literature. It’s easy to argue that alienation is encoded in his themes, but only the hostage scenes have any emotional heft, and a shortage of humanity leaves the novel slippery and somewhat unsatisfying.

Papal Sin, *by Garry Wills* (*Doubleday; $25*). Ever since Pius IX’s decree of papal infallibility, in 1870, his successors have promoted the notion that the principal test of Catholicism is obedience to the Pope. Wills, a Catholic, citing ancient practice and Cardinal Newman’s conviction that the laity is to be consulted on matters of doctrine, argues that the Church is not merely the clergy but the whole body of believers. His examination of papal policies on such topics as the Holocaust, clerical celibacy, and the role of women finds that the Church has often distorted history and Scripture in the attempt to bolster its authority. There’s an undertone of grief to this rationally argued book, which ends with a wistful vision of the Church as it might be.

The Chief, *by David Nasaw (Houghton Mifflin; $35).* Few publishers have loomed as large in their lifetimes, or cast as long a shadow after death, as William Randolph Hearst. Heir to a mining fortune, he took the world as his birthright, treating the deans at Harvard (from which he was tossed out) and the Fascist leaders of Europe (whom he employed as columnists) with the same confident condescension. He enjoyed a vast income, and delighted in spending it—on art works, on entertaining, and on his great estate, San Simeon. He felt it was his prerogative to dictate the views of his papers (and thus, he hoped, of his readers), and he was not over-scrupulous about distinguishing between covering the news and editorializing. Nasaw’s judicious and comprehensive biography sensibly seeks to understand its subject, not to judge him.



Fiona Range, *by Mary McGarry Morris (Viking; $24.95).* As readable as its heroine is compulsive, this is the kind of book that makes you stay up half the night and (like its heroine) hate yourself in the morning. Fiona just has to be nice to her drug-dealing ex, or fall in love with her favorite cousin’s fiancé, or pursue the crazed Vietnam vet reputed to be her father. The characters have weirdly varying powers of perception, and that keeps the juggled plots in the air, but it doesn’t matter if you guess the gothic family secrets: this author is the literary equivalent of Spanish fly.

The Harold Letters, *by Clement Greenberg, edited by Janice Van Horne (Counterpoint; $27.50).* The critic’s letters to a college buddy read like a cross between “Speak, Memory” and “Notes from the Underground” narrated by a smart-ass Salinger character. The collection begins with Greenberg as an undergraduate good-for-nothing, follows him through his peregrinations as a tie salesman and government employee, and ends with his arrival as an editor (of *Partisan Review*), an art critic, and a poet, all the while documenting his disastrous personal life. Although his hubris and bigotry are sometimes appalling, his voice is difficult to resist: “My father says I’m a lazy son of a bitch and a disgrace to my heredity but I don’t care, because I like him too much.”

DANCING

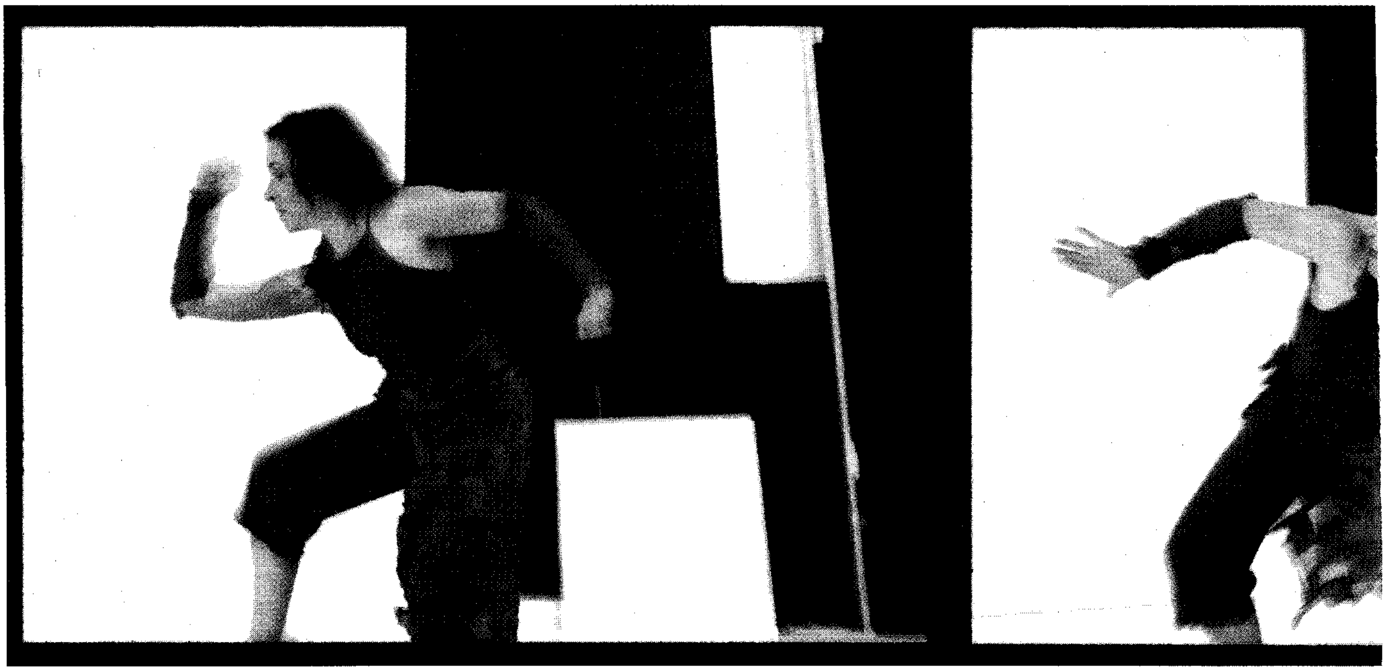
DOWNTOWN

Tracing the latest modern steps.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Everyone says that the war between modern dance and ballet is over. If so, why do I sense something funny in the reaction of the modern-dance crowd to Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project? White Oak is peculiar enough already: an American modern-dance troupe headed by a Russian ballet star. Baryshnikov, even in his youth, was a questing spirit, intent on new ways of dancing. And all around him, at the Kirov, he saw every new idea squashed, vetoed, sent to the Urals. Hence his defection, in 1974. Soon after, and all the while that he was pursuing his Western ballet career, he was moonlighting with modern-dance choreographers. When he took over the directorship of American Ballet Theatre, in 1980, he went further, commissioning ballets from modern-dance choreographers: Twyla Tharp, Mark Morris, Karole Armitage, David Gordon. After he left A.B.T., in 1989, he went further still, founding White Oak, an all-modern-dance company, with Mark Morris. Some people have said that he did this to extend his performing career, but when you look at the White Oak programs nothing is clearer than his reverence for American modern dance. And he likes it *all.* Modern dance, like any schismatic movement, has its sects and countersects, its Baptists and Methodists, who spend as much time spitting at each other as at the mother church. But Baryshnikov made no distinctions. Martha Graham plus the ones who rebelled against her (Paul Taylor, Merce Cunningham); Hanya Holm and Erick Hawkins plus the young people who viewed them as the soul of corniness—all were put on White Oak's schedule.

Now Baryshnikov has taken another step, has become a sort of historian of modern dance. Later this year, White Oak, with David Gordon directing, will mount two programs of new and old works by the principal choreographers of Judson Dance Theatre, the group that in the early sixties steered modern dance away from its heroic, here-is-my-soul roots and into conceptualism. It will be interesting to see how those pieces play, now that their moment has passed. But we had a sort of preview in the concert that White Oak gave at the Brooklyn Academy of Music early this month. Included were old works by the Judsonites Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer, and they looked wonderful, for the most part.



In the sixties, Judson Dance Theatre espoused an aesthetic of "No to spectacle no to virtuosity." Sally Silvers is one choreographer who

The great surprise was Rainer's piece. After Judson disbanded, Rainer went off to become a filmmaker and never looked back. When, last year, Baryshnikov approached her to create a piece for White Oak, she hadn't made a dance in twenty-five years, and her response, from what I hear, was, basically, "What? You want me to *what?*" But she went ahead and put together a sort of collage of bits from her work of the sixties and seventies, calling it "After Many a Summer Dies the Swan." Some parts are dated—above all, the political pronouncements, which sound extremely naïve in the year 2000. Still, there was a lot to love in this piece. Michael Lomeka, who should get an award for breath control, recited a heavenly passage from Nabokov on how a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, meanwhile demonstrating the metamorphosis in an athletic solo. Raquel Aedo and Emily Coates did a sort of roll-off-a-log duet in which, while delivering a Gertrude Steinish dialogue, they climbed on top of each other sideways and of course fell off, again and again. In the performance I saw, they got the giggles in the middle, and the audience did, too. To those of us who arrived in town too late to see Judson, the movement is normally described as a summit of intellectual purity. These were people (so the story goes) who were too smart to dance, people who eschewed drama, glamour, all that bourgeois trash. Rainer's 1965 manifesto—"No to spectacle no to virtuosity . . . no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer," etc.—is endlessly quoted. We aren't often told how the Judsonites ran naked and had a good time. Baryshnikov's show reminded us, and that was nice.

l faithful to the primacy of intellect. Photographs by Eileen Travell.

If we're grateful, imagine the feelings of the modern-dance folk. Baryshnikov doesn't just present their work. Because of his huge celebrity, he assures them large, mainstream audiences. Works that they showed, in the sixties and seventies, to maybe a hundred sandalled folk in a downtown church are now being danced for thousands of people, around the world. Last year, Danspace Project, the modern-dance series at St. Mark's Church in the East Village, celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. And who was the honoree at the gala? Mikhail Baryshnikov. As modern dancers see it, he has defected again, to *their* country. And now that he has done so, they seem to feel rather more kindly toward ballet. Earlier this year, Rainer told Elizabeth Zimmer of the *Village Voice* what she thought Baryshnikov brought to modern dance: "There's something about his *épaulement*. . . . The way he changes direction, with his whole body—there's nothing like it." Actually, there is something like it: classical ballet, the discipline in which Baryshnikov was trained, and which was once anathema to the modern-dance crowd.

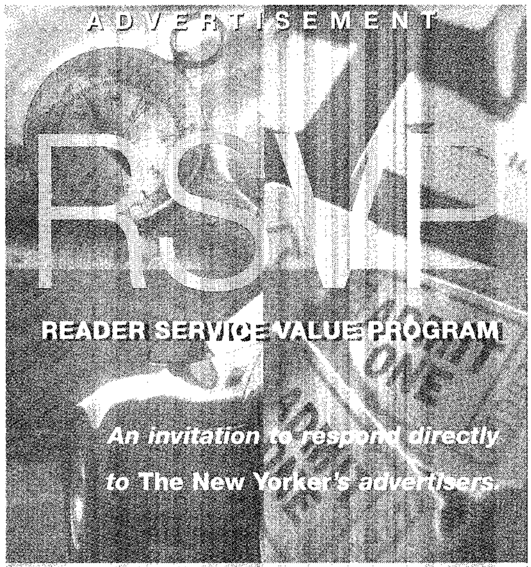
No doubt there is some ambivalence. How does it feel to these former refuseniks to see their work displayed to the plutocrats of West Palm Beach? How does it go down with them that White Oak's most popular pieces are the solos made for Baryshnikov by Twyla Tharp and Mark Morris, the two modern-dance makers best at bringing out his *balletic* qualities? (There was an adorable new piece by Morris—"Peccadillos," to Satie—on the BAM program.) More to the point, how do they respond when, as occasionally happens—for example, in its rendition of Brown's "Glacial Decoy"—White Oak performs modern-dance works with less than the full modern-dance heave and thrust? They must have mixed feelings, of the same sort that modern dance has always had toward ballet, and American art toward European art: an attraction, a recoil, a secret love. In an interview for *TimeOut*, Gia Kourlas asked Baryshnikov whether, if he had been born in the United States, he might have discovered modern dance sooner:

> MB: I could have probably started with the modern dance.
> GK: And never done ballet?
> MB: And never done ballet.

You can almost hear her gulp. If he had never done ballet, he wouldn't have meant half as much to us.

One interesting thing about White Oak is that, by staging dances that have been out of repertory for years, it allows us to measure their influence. Did Judson leave a mark? Yes, and you find it all over downtown. Randomness, casualness, simultaneity, "found" movement, all the techniques that the sixties avant-garde adapted, basically, from John Cage—you can see them in the new choreography. Also the politics, above all the sexual politics: ungendered dance, cross-gendered dance, guys in skirts. This is partly Zeitgeist, but partly Judson, too.

Strange, though. We've got used to those things; we take them for granted. And what seems, today, the most striking characteristic of downtown dance is their opposite: an extreme emotionalism, a kind of passion of the body. This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was bound to come—thesis, antithesis—but it is also the direct legacy of the German "dance theatre" artist Pina Bausch, who, after Judson, was the most potent influence on the downtown choreographers. Bausch gave her first New York concerts in the mid-eighties and, with her dark, sexy psychodramas, blew the minds of a lot of young dancemakers who were weary of conceptualism and ready, once again, to bare their souls. We are still seeing the results.

The best example is John Jasperse. Jasperse has been picked up by Baryshnikov, who is interested in the young as well as the old. On the White Oak program at BAM there was a new piece by him, "See Through Knot," that was both abstract and a little hysterical. (Darkness, slicing arms, grating sound.) The works he makes for his own company are more hysterical. Jasperse danced for two years in Europe, in the company of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Belgium's answer to Pina Bausch, and you can tell. In his 1995 "Excessories" three men pull their penises out of their flies and two women expose their breasts, and they all stand in front of us, violently pulling at these soft, secret parts, meanwhile staring at us defiantly. In his new "Fort Blossom," which had its première last month at the Kitchen, Jasperse and Miguel Gutierrez both perform buck naked. Many's the time, in recent dance concerts, I have felt that the audience was being asked to look straight up the rear ends of the performers, but in "Fort Blossom" that is literally true. At Judson, body was an extension of intellect. In Jasperse, body is an extension of emotion—a subcutaneous crisis.

And then there are downtown choreographers who are still faithful to the primacy of intellect—Sally Silvers, for example. In 1985, in *The Drama Review*, Silvers published a manifesto of her "political aesthetics." What this involved was a great deal of what Judson involved: no stylization, no hierarchies, no privileging of one movement over another—in other words, no heroics, no charm, even. And though that was fifteen years ago, Silvers is still an egghead. Many of her works are performed to aggressively miscellaneous tape collages by the language poet Bruce Andrews, her longtime companion. And the leading trait of her choreography is its miscellaneous character: the lack of repetition, of pattern. What we see is one unashamedly maladroit movement followed by another. Judson could not have asked for anything more.

Yet the new piece, "Storming Heaven," which Silvers presented in April at the Kitchen—a dance history of revolutions, from the Paris Commune to Chiapas—was very moving, and what was most moving in it was just Silvers' body, its heroic antiheroics. However carefully thought out, however politically serious, "Storming Heaven" would be nothing without this strange, determined little person who looks as though she hadn't combed her hair in three days, who tumbles over, then sticks her foot in her face, then gets up and, utterly unruffled, sticks her foot somewhere else and tumbles over again. She thinks she's telling us about insurgency politics. We think she's speaking to us about the human condition. But I don't care what she thinks, as long as she goes on dancing.

Dance is the most intimate art, the most unbrainy art, because it is done wholly with the body, which is so limited in its ability to speak anything but the truth. Dancers tell us who they are, and, very often, the dance depends just on that. Baryshnikov said something like this in his foreword to Robert Greskovic's dance history, "Ballet 101": "When a dancer comes onstage, he is not just a blank slate that the choreographer has written on. Behind him he has all the decisions he has made in life. . . . You are looking at the person he is, the person who, at this point, he cannot help but be."

The only thing you can compare this to is singing, another art that is produced entirely by the flesh. Why does Plácido Domingo's singing make you want to go out on a date with him? Why does Renée Fleming make you want her for your mother, so that you might crawl into the curve of her vocal line and go to sleep there? Because that is who they are. Same with Baryshnikov; same with Sally Silvers. "No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer"? In dance, those aren't wiles. They're the story. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

NO LIMIT

Going too far in the Revolution, in blaxploitation, and in gross-out comedy.

BY DAVID DENBY

Mel Gibson in "The Patriot": the kind of guy who would never wear a powdered wig.

MARK ZINGARELLI

To modern eyes, an American in a powdered wig looks about as comfortable as a nun in a bikini. This is just one reason among many that the Revolutionary War has never been much of a movie subject. The conflict doesn't have, for us, the overwhelming pathos of the Civil War, with its beautiful young men writing eloquent letters to families and sweethearts before going to their deaths in the endless slaughter. The War of Independence may offer courage and dignity without pomp, but as a subject it is neither heartbreaking nor entertaining. The plain American virtue of the period outclasses us—modern irony and informality don't know what to make of breeches, long-coats, and grammar, and schoolbook piety becomes almost a necessary refuge. The people who made the Revolutionary War epic "The Patriot"—the screenwriter Robert Rodat ("Saving Private Ryan") and the director Roland Emmerich ("Independence Day")—seem to know all this, and they did something shrewd: they made our resistance to the era part of the substance of the movie.

The dominant style of combat in "The Patriot" seems crazy to us. Across the open fields of South Carolina, the two forces, the redcoats and the Continental Army, walk toward each other to the sound of a solemn drumbeat. When the lines are about forty yards apart, the men stop, stand, and fire. Shot, they seem almost surprised to learn that lead is lead and flesh is flesh. They fall more easily than wheat stalks. But, as "The Patriot" tells it, a few fighters in Colonial South Carolina were not eager to go down. The movie is about a certain Benjamin Martin (Mel Gibson), who is the kind of guy who would never wear a powdered wig, and who has an interesting past. In the French and Indian Wars, Martin (an amalgam of various Carolina swamp-rat heroes) performed with murderous efficiency. By 1776, however, he is a widower with seven children, and he wants no part of the new conflict, which he thinks will be fought too close to home. Martin is right. The war comes straight up the front lawn of his plantation, and a vicious British officer, Colonel William Tavington (Jason Isaacs), appears on horseback and orders one atrocity after another, including the murder of one of Martin's sons. Isaacs—cold, clipped, elegant—overdoes the narrow-eyed sadism, but the scene has unexpected power. Martin can't do a thing to stop the murder; his other children are vulnerable, and we identify with his helplessness, even though we know we're being set up for another vengeance plot. Right away, Martin takes to the woods; he ambushes a British platoon and goes on a rampage. The savage comes out in him as he wields a hatchet and chops up the startled redcoats, shocking his sons (and us).

Martin, it seems, is not reluctant at all; he's eager to fight, but when he fights he goes too far, and he feels guilty—he thinks the death of his son is God's punishment. At least, that's the way the movie is set up, and if Rodat and Emmerich had developed the tragic contradictions within Martin they might have made something great. They didn't do that, but "The Patriot" is pretty damn good, anyway—square, but also stirring, and in a way that never feels cheap. The filmmakers work on a large scale, and the movie becomes an intelligent and frightening drama about the nature of war. The British commander, Lieutenant-General Earl Cornwallis (the invaluable Tom Wilkinson), slaughters thousands in the stand-and-shoot manner and is prepared to make South Carolina his private estate. But Cornwallis, an aristocrat, insists on rules, on *conduct.* After all, putting down a rebellion is what English military professionals do. Once they are victorious, they will reëstablish "commercial relations" with the subdued Colonials. Tavington, by contrast, is like an S.S. officer on the Eastern Front. When Benjamin Martin forms a band of irregulars, and wages what we would now call guerrilla warfare, Tavington retaliates by terrorizing the local population, and suddenly "The Patriot" jumps, in consciousness, right over the nineteenth century and lands in the twentieth, when war becomes all-encompassing and pitiless.

The German-born Roland Emmerich, who made everything in "Independence Day" into a pop-cult joke, turns out to have a talent not only for violence

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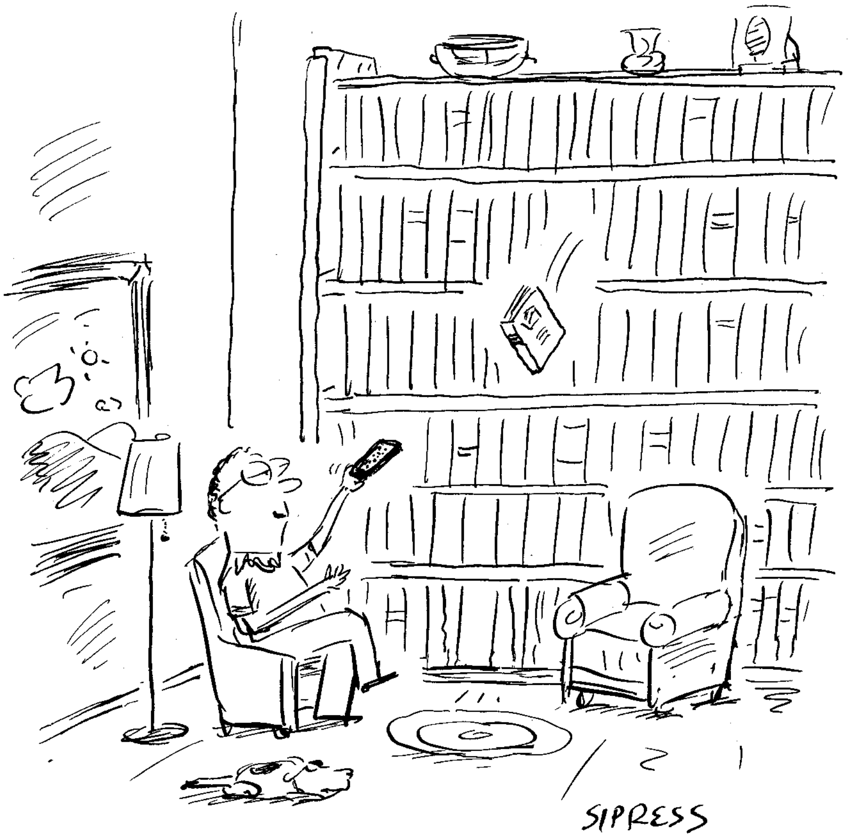

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but for straightforward exposition, and even for reverent celebration. The charitable will perhaps overlook one dreadful mistake—the happy slaves on the plantations—and notice how movingly staged many of the family and community scenes are. The trouble is we lose Martin the tragic hero in the many scenes of skirmish and battle. He suffers, but he triumphs, and he becomes, simply, the people's hero—a sort of swampland Washington. Certainly, something of symbolic value is being suggested in the scene in which he matches wits with the brilliant Cornwallis. Mel Gibson, a little thicker in feature than he once was, still has his likably buoyant quality, the boyish lilt of stardom, and we are meant to think, Here is democratic man. The events of the war—not just the Declaration of Independence—force the Americans to define themselves as different from the English, and, in particular, different from tradition-bound aristocrats like Cornwallis. Martin improvises, casts aside the rules, finds his way. In the final battle, he grabs the American flag at a crucial moment and runs with it, rousing the battered Colonials, and the moment produces a swell of emotion. For good or ill, Benjamin Martin is the spirit of a new land.

Head shaved, goatee minimalized (etched almost), and body sheathed in black-on-black Armani, Samuel L. Jackson is a shaft all right, a blade of style. Kenneth Tynan once called John Gielgud a "tight, smart, walking umbrella"; in the new "Shaft," Jackson looks like an elegant cane topped by a death's-head knob. Until it collapses into an endless shoot-out, in which everyone in the tristate area allows himself to be blown away by the hero, "Shaft" is mostly disreputable fun. The dialogue is all rhymed and syncopated—Jackson catches a line of insult and throws it back, and then someone comes at him once more, and he throws it back again, and so on. It's as if the world's conversation consisted entirely of profane soreheads telling one another off. The director, John Singleton, has some good moments: the opening scene, in which the police detective John Shaft (the nephew of the original blaxploitation hero) interrogates some people in a bar after a murder, feels like the beginning of a smart urban thriller. But this movie, even more than the 1971 original, is concerned less with detection than with the aesthetics of hero worship: Singleton helps Jackson feed the audience the kind of implacable self-assurance that it wants. He is joined in this task by another virtuoso: as a fey Dominican drug dealer, Jeffrey Wright comes into his own. Wright burrows deep into the accent—he plays with the words in a way that a Latino might not, and we laugh at the body language, the half-heard insinuations. Wright is so inventive and unpredictable that he seems to be making himself up as he goes along. When his kid brother gets shot, he makes a run for the killer while jabbing himself in the chest with a little ice pick—perhaps the most flamboyant expression of grief seen in movies since the silent era's great soundless howls. The plot of "Shaft" is sheer disorder, and most of the violence is absurd, but the movie keeps its compact with the audience. It presents life as violent and corrupt, redeemable only by assertions of style. The audience (including me) that enjoys a movie like this may be immersed in cynicism, but its pleasure suggests that it is far from demoralized.

Early in "Me, Myself, and Irene," Jim Carrey's wife falls in love with a combative black midget who takes offense easily. Jabbering away, he slashes at Carrey's kneecaps. There's an initial shock—an explosion of laughter and delight at the flagrant breaking of taboos. But after the first uproar the humor dies. The midget isn't a character; he's a snarling, calculated outrage, and he overstays his welcome in less than a minute. The Farrelly brothers, Bobby and Peter, have become famous for their gross-out comedies ("Dumb and Dumber" and "There's Something About Mary"), but their work in this new movie is lazy and second-rate. The script was written ten years ago; the Farrellys updated it (with their friend Mike Cerrone), but they couldn't pull the material together. Carrey plays a Rhode Island state trooper named Charlie, a mild guy with a beaver grin. He gets pushed around by everyone and represses so many hostile impulses that his personality splits in two: out of him pops a new man, Hank, who has a low bedroom voice, like Edward James Olmos, and cool panther moves. Switching between the two, Carrey performs miracles with his face, teeth, groin, ass, and elbows. But the movie is a bumpy and dithering mess. Charlie has to transport Renée Zellweger to upstate New York to face some sort of criminal charge, and their adventures on the road call out first one Carrey character (respectful) and then the other (obnoxious). Pursing her lips when something unspeakable happens, Zellweger is a charming actress, but she's working with a dervish: Carrey whirls back and forth so often that she isn't given the space to develop her relationship with either version of him. The movie may please some people as gross-out comedy, but it fails as romantic comedy.

"Me, Myself, and Irene" is all starts and stops, and after a while you forget why you are doing anything, and why anyone is doing anything, and why any of it could possibly matter. Of course, the Farrellys give us plenty of tingles and jolts—a turd here and there, a man with a fowl stuck up his rear. Bobby Farrelly has been quoted as saying that it's hard to make people laugh without "breaking boundaries." But if you're convinced that this is true you may wind up thinking that anything that pushes past boundaries is funny. Pretty soon, there are no limits left, and a fowl stuck up someone's rear is just ugly. At that point, you've got a slovenly, rhythmless movie on your hands. "Me, Myself, and Irene" is offensive not because it's in bad taste but because it's badly made. And so I wonder: when people in the press say this kind of stuff is great, do they really find it great—or do they feel that they have to get on the bandwagon because it's happening, it's hit material, and they can't afford to be left behind? Critics may need some boundaries, too. ♦

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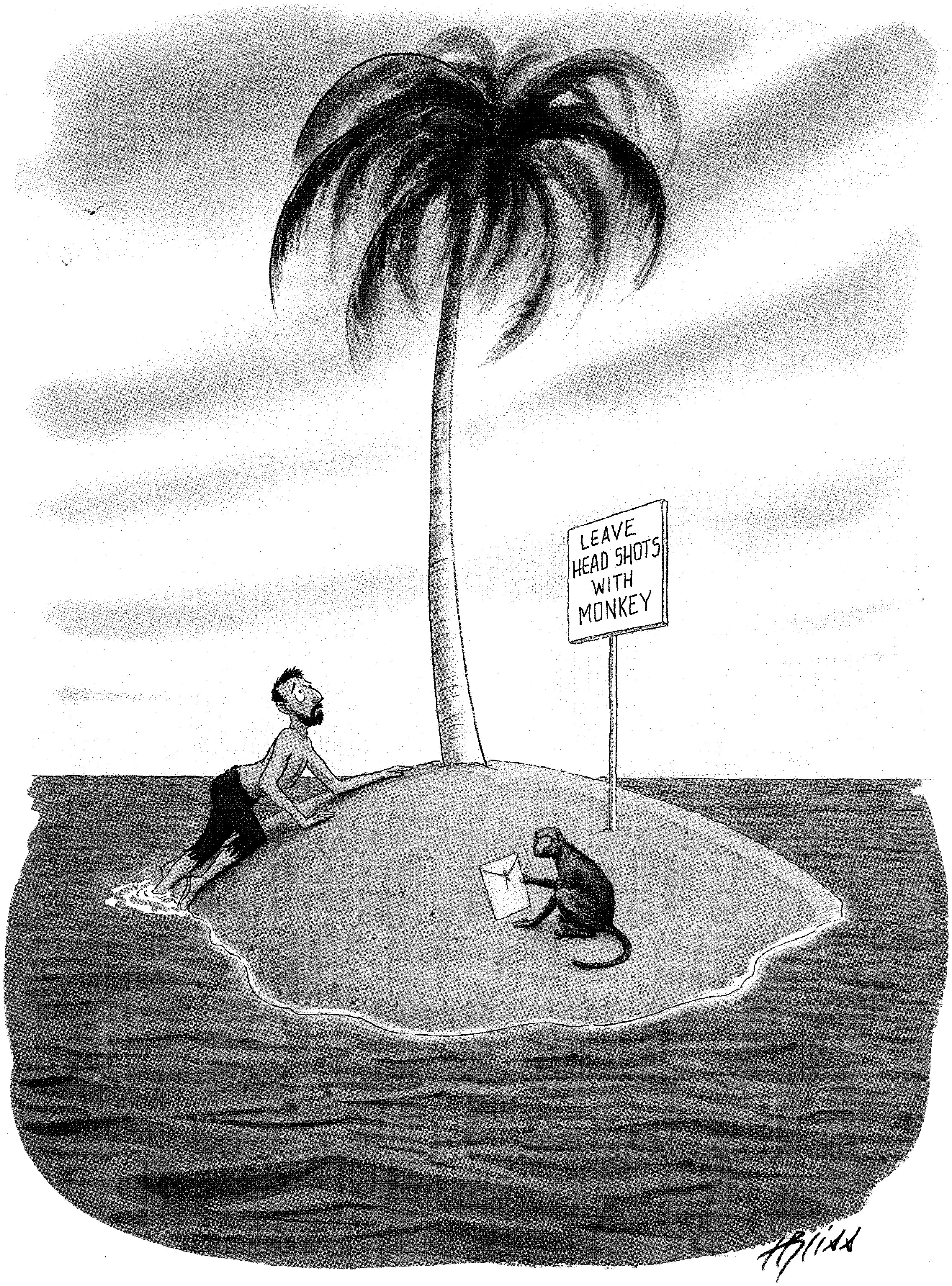
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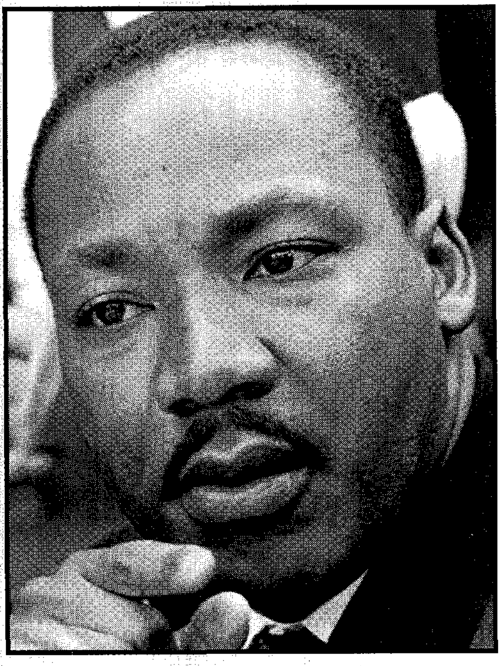

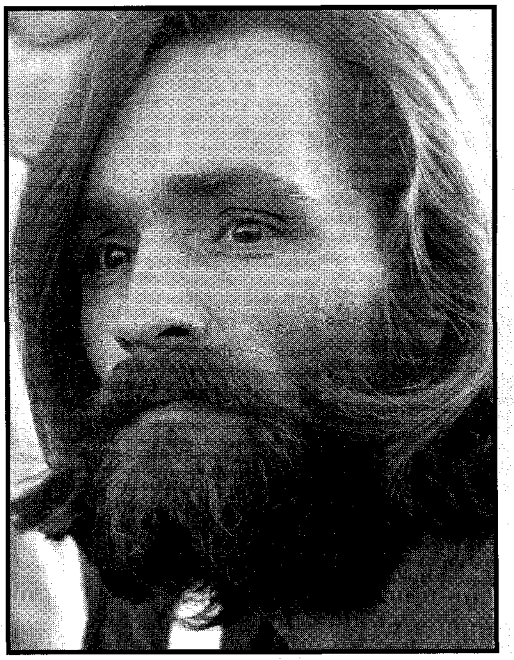

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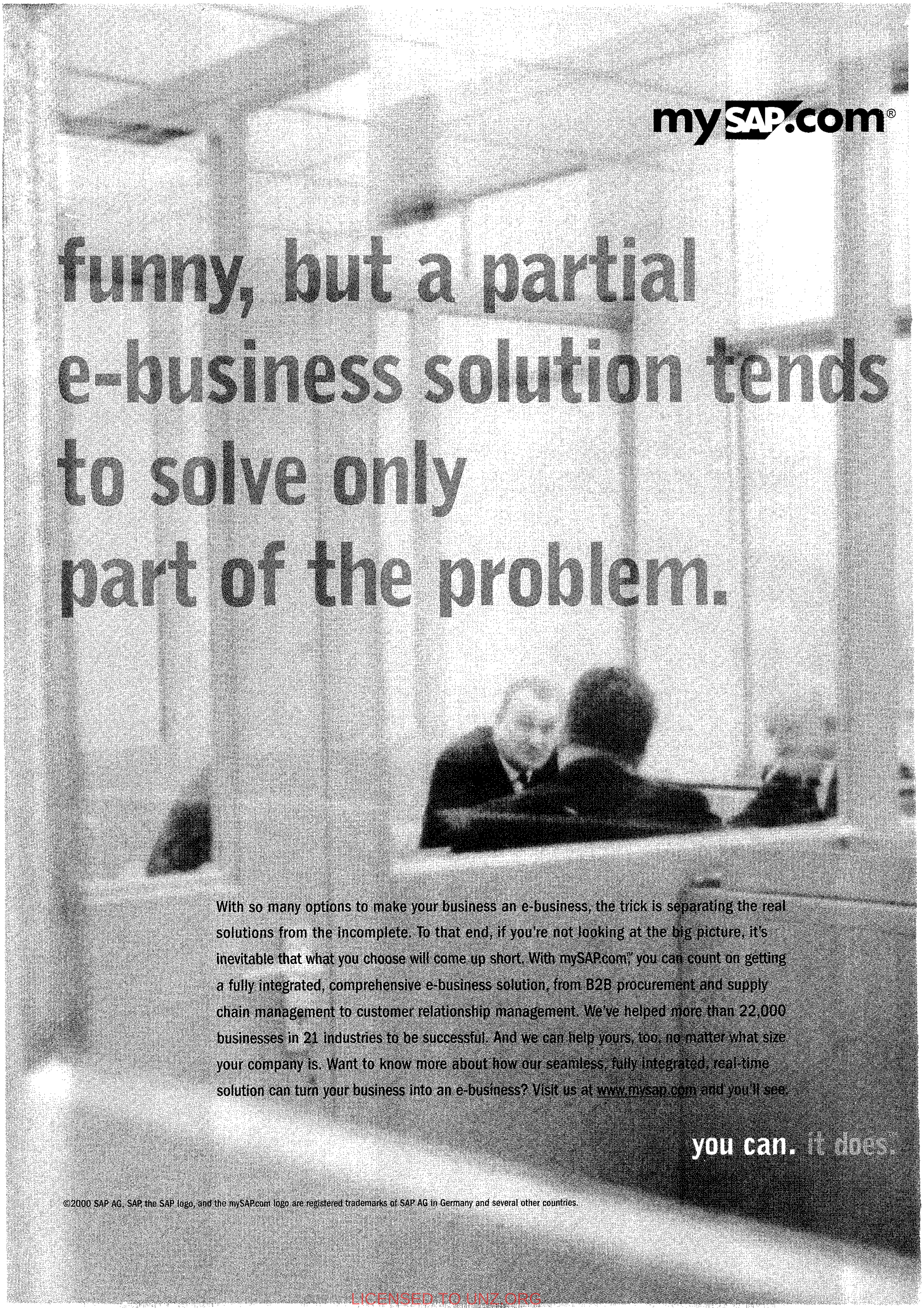

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funny, but a partial e-business solution tends to solve only part of the problem.

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